Spring 3-1-1974

Nexus, Spring 1974

Wright State University Community

NEXUS
50 cents

Nexus

is a student publication of
Wright State University.
Quarterly, 50 cents an issue.
Write to NEXUS, Wright State University,
Dayton, Ohio 45431.

Spring 1974

CONTENTS

HARDY

by Dave Gordon

The corpse was dead and no mistake. I don't make mistakes. My name—Joe Hardy. My trade—detective. My goal—Justice. My reward—glory, with fringe benefits.

The body had been stabbed six times in the back and mailed to my office with no further explanation.

"Another suicide," I chuckled dryly. (I've spent thirty-five years in the school of hard knocks. My diploma—a dry chuckle.)

The brown telephone on my brown desk jangled mechanically. Instantly, all in a single motion, I picked up the receiver and spoke into the end with the little curly cord coming out of it.

"My name–Joe Hardy," I rasped confidently. "My trade–detective. My go–"

"Have you got your mail yet this morning?" inquired a woman's voice femininely.

"I haven't even got my female yet," I retorted masculinely.

The caller was a tantalizing appetizing little morsel–sitting there in a staggering blue smock, her long blonde hair tortured into submission.

"Have you received the Russian ambassador with six stab wounds in the back?" she persisted doggedly.

"What's it to you, sweetheart," I countered swiftly.

"Be here at three this afternoon and I'll show you," she came back futuristically.

I was about to say something brilliant, tough, and uncompromising when we were suddenly cut off. I had a hunch she knew something. And those that have tried to disregard my hunches have paid for their folly in tears and/or blood. A case in point is chapter seventeen of my last book: '*The Clue of the Nuclear Hollocaust*, which may be purchased at any reputable bookstore. The paperback edition has been delayed due to a possible law suit. I sauntered nonchalantly out of the office and vaulted behind the wheel of my little custom-made sportscar. Joe Hardy had a morning's work to do. The little beauty leaped from her parking space and screamed along the road. I felt her churning under me, desperate to please me, responding to my every whim.

"Magnet kay thirty-five double apostrophe zee," crackled my little custom-made radio efficiently. "This is Prito. Your secretary told me about the ambassador. She says she found a box of Wheaties in his pocket, a horseshoe wrapped around his neck, and a sickly grin on his face. Can you make anything of that?"

"Prito," I snarled wisely, "If you last long enough in this game you'll learn that clues and that deductive reasoning crap don't sell. People want excitement, so get off your rear end and have a few narrow escapes. Better yet, ask my publisher if he thinks it's a good idea for me to go on the Carson show."

I drove across town like a maniac, causing a near accident at every intersection, and swaggered into the office of the Chief of Police.

"Got a make on a broad in a staggering blue smock?" I probed casually.

"Not officially," he answered friendlily. "But I think I saw her on 'Mannix' last week."

"Well, she's in my story now," I announced proudly, "and I'm off to see how much thrill-packed suspense I can get out of her."

"Why do you do it, Joe?" the chief interrogated fervently. "Why do you gamble with death?"

"Listen, Chief," I crooned toughly, "I've rubbed elbows with every two-bit punk that was ready to sing a song of sixpence for a bottle full of rye, and I know that anyone's mother will kick you downstairs for a can of beer. I've learned to live with it."

I bounded gracefully out of the impressed silence of the chief's office, and drove aimlessly up a mountainside. I found myself speeding along a narrow mountain road with a sheer three-hundred-foot drop to my immediate left. Suddenly some sort of vehicle pulled up on my right. I don't remember for sure, but I think there was a mysterious dark figure behind the wheel. My car was sprayed with gasoline and set afire. A hand reached through my window and dropped a grenade in the glove compartment. Then my little custom-made beauty was forced off the cliff. Expressionlessly I brushed off my pants and drove back to the office.

"I've examined the body," my secretary told me confidentially. "He appears to have been a Russian ambassador. He was lying on his stomach at the time he was stabbed. He'd recently been reading Kafka's diaries, a book of Rod McKuen's poetry, and–"

"Good work, Baby," I consoled her affectionately. "I've got another body for you to examine."

"It's time for my lunch break," she assured me excitedly.

"Mine, too," I purred suggestively. "And all I want is you, Baby."

She scampered around the desk and into the hall. I joined the game. I caught her in the elevator, and I'd tell you what we did then, but my mother might read this. I had stepped back into the hall and was tucking in my shirt when ten or eleven rough-looking thugs (one of them black) burst out of the restroom and opened fire on me with submachine guns. I ducked just in time, then came in hard and low, my fists shooting out in every direction known to man. One seedy-looking customer who had remained on his feet hurled his weapon at me and dashed for the ladies' room. I snatched up a nearby pistol which was disguised as an aquarium and blew his head off.

"Hardy," a voice behind me heartily ejaculated.

"You got the name. Let's see what you can do with the man," I greeted swavely. I was confronting a man in a federal investigator's uniform.

"I'm a federal investigator," he confided brusquely. "That was fine work, Hardy. I thought you were a dead man."

"Listen, bud," I advised philosophically. "You know we're all gonna be dead one of these days–six feet under–pushing up daisies. That's what happens when you're dead, you know. They bury you in the ground. I've learned to live with it."

"You talk big, Hardy," he spewed audaciously. "How much do you know?"

My fist caught him on the point of the jaw. He crumpled heavily to the floor. I picked him up and knocked him down again.

"You're out of your league, Mac," I chortled solemnly.

Joe Hardy had an appointment to keep. It was seventeen minutes after three when I reached the house of the chick that had the hunch. Or was it I that had the hunch about her? Either way, I meant to find out. I was tippytoeing up her fire escape when something hit me like a ton of bricks. I clawed my way out from under the pile, and there she sat. The satanic light of her eyes was refracted by her staggering blue smock.

"I'm sorry about those bricks," she panted passionately rushing to me and flinging herself in my lap. "I was building a bookcase of them, and it fell out the window."

"No sweat, Baby," I comforted her hungrily. "Where can I change clothes?"

Fifteen minutes later we were doing something else when I noticed her take a sword from the scabbard on the night table.

"That's a big toy for a little girl like you," I observed cleverly.

"The better to kill you with," she replied enthusiastically and slashed vehemently at my neck.

I felt the blade graze my chin as I leaped to my feet. Picking up one of her shoes, I knocked the weapon from her hand.

"Confess," I urged her urgently as I wrestled her to the bed. "You don't want this story to end with that guilt on your conscience."

"I admit it," she admitted, tearfully resigning herself to a cheap melodramatic climax. "We forced your little custom-made beauty over the cliff. We hired ten or eleven thugs (one of them black) to submachine gun you to death. We bombed Pearl Harbor, sank the Maine, and forgot the Alamo. We murdered the Russian ambassador for reasons only a political scientist could understand. So I see no point in explaining it to the general public."

"Poor kid," I sighed succinctly. "What ever led you to this life of vanity and corruption? Take her away, Prito."

"We can't end it like this," Prito protested pretentiously. "This hasn't been a story at all. It's only a cluster of unconnected illogical events. It's complete chaos."

"You're right, Prito," I reflected reluctantly. "It's too real. We'll give this story to one of those college literary magazines."

Marsha Carpenter

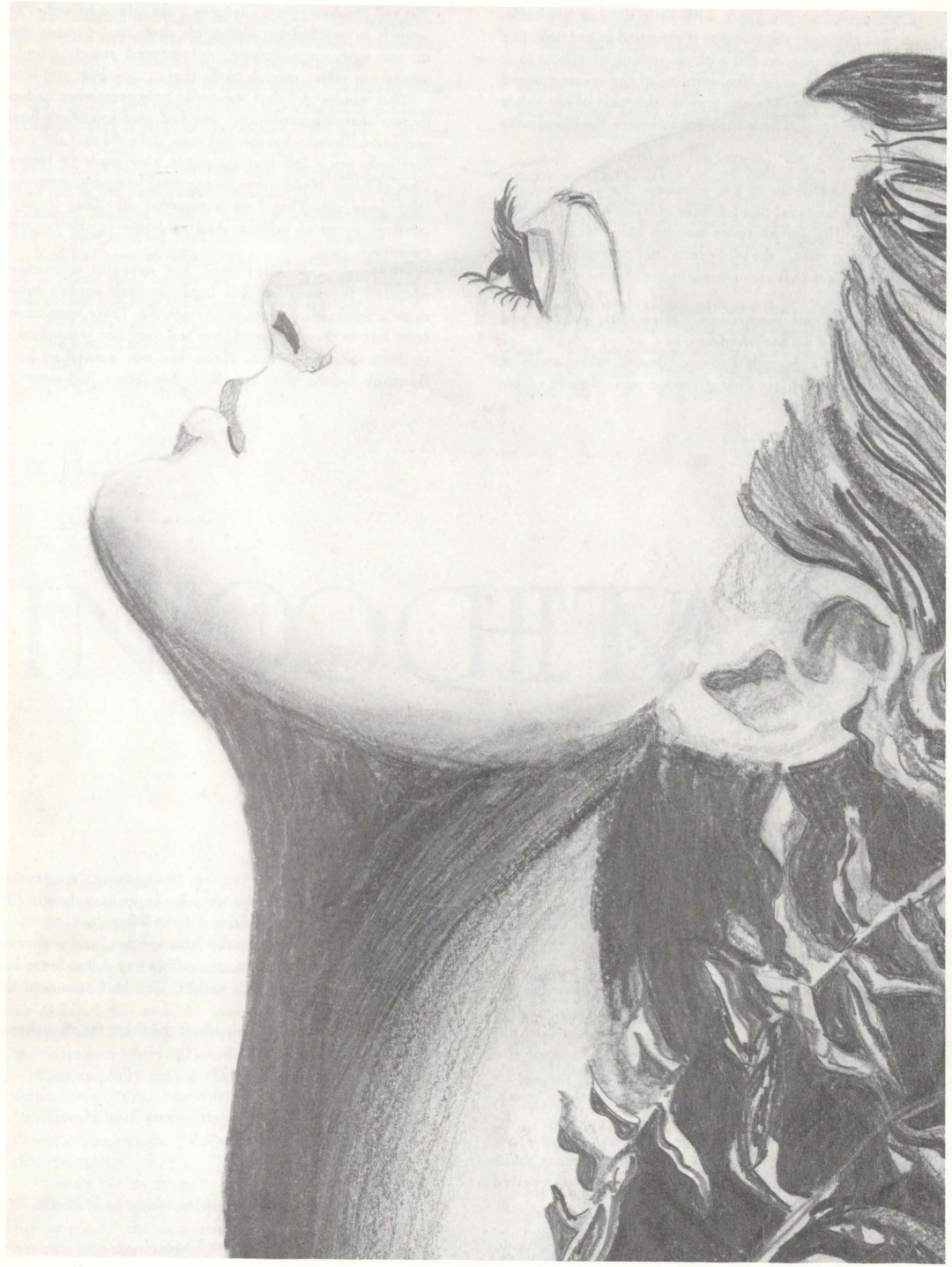
When I scream against a star
It is the sound of a tree crashing
Where there are no ears,
But I want that silence to rustle
In the chambers of your heart.
When first we collided on our paths
White heat of forming star was ours—
The bang was all;
We could not hear murmurs of a distant world
Light years away, nor did we care.
Now fusion cools and separate sounds intrude;
You are in me
While preparing tomorrow's lecture,
And I, this poem.
I scream and it echoes
In the void of a million stars.

Icarus II

Out of love you gave me feathers to fly
Plucked them one by one from your soft breast,
Then crafted them in beeswax on my back,
And warned me of the power of the sun.
Mornings, wings are cumbersome,
Catching in elevators and revolving doors,
But at night, dreaming, they have a subtle strength.
A transcendence I recall was there
Before you fashioned wings.
And yet such things are useless here on earth.
I would fly . . .
Except the splendor of the sun is tempting,
And I syllogize from one small case
Which plummeted into the sea.

Today while hanging out the sheets
In musky winds of earth and probing life,
I thought of you.
Each sheet barely tethered by its edge
Flapped mutely violent at restraints,
Then shuddered to calm,
Sun stroking its long white length.
A flicker with a band of red
Hopped boldly near in search of ants
While someone's cat, oblivious to its prey
Chased his tail in endless circles
Through moldering piles of winter leaves.
A lust I thought had died,
A lust for you,
Formed from earth and sun and sheets
Thrust its turgid force through my loin,
Then withered in my mind
With practiced thoughts of all that I must do.
I heard the children call within
And answered out of custom,
Noting in the corner of my mind
A barren place
Where I would plant some jonquils in the fall.

You shave your face with careless grace,
Blowing cheeks out like a bullfrog,
Stroking clean paths through snowy lather,
Posturing, watching your own movements,
All the while talking to me through the mirror
Silvered words that seal me in a chrysalis
Of other mirrors, other men,
All of them omnipotent while shaving.



DEATH OF INNOCENCE

LEE HARDESTY

Ellen peeled at the apple with little sighs of her knife. Bent over the sink, she stood as if absorbed in her task. She saw the apple, maroon red with something of yellow in it like sunshine; the mush-like softness of the cream-colored fruit beneath, her hands, the grayish, thin skin of her hands and the blue veins. There's no doubt where the blood runs in the aged.

"Cut the brown spots off."

Ellen looked down at her grandson. Six years ago, she had had no grandson. She felt now as if she had always had a grandson. The brown spots worried him. "Such a little thing to worry you," she said gently, her thin smile pushing up at all the lines that came down in her cheeks.

"I don't like 'em."

"Then we'll cut them away," Ellen said, nodding and settling her head on her shoulders.

The knife cut through a spot of brown, taking some of the good flesh with it. The afternoon sun of early spring faded through the window upon them, touching first the tall angular woman, touching the yellowed silver of her hair. "What happened to that girl that I used to be," Ellen wondered, "when life was so simple? I am not the same person."

"No, I am not that young girl." The knife paused in the soft flesh of the apple. "She was too soft. Too quiet. Too gentle. Too unsuspecting that brown spots come with the ripening." The knife whipped on across the flesh of the apple, leaving thin smears of red, like blood. "She was so young. She thought there was Someone to cut away brown spots, too."

Ellen looked down at the little boy. She held up a curl of bright peeling on the silver of the knife. "They say that's where all the vitamins are," she said seriously; the rutted halves of her lips kept working.

"I don't like that part."

Ellen sighed, soft as the breath of a wish. "You don't just tell children things anymore," she said to herself. "You wrap it in psychology, and cajole them, and pamper them in one vast magni-literate, over-learned society. And if you're not smart enough to do that . . . too bad; you lose."

That young girl that she could only remember had not known that she could lose. She had read too many books and had believed what she had read. Believed that she could love only once and that marriages were made in Heaven. That children could never be anything but pure, even when they grew up. That love conquered all. That it was a privilege to go to college. And an honor to die for your country.

"Edward . . . ." Ellen shut her eyes for a moment, squeezed the wrinkled lids hard: in their sunken brown cages a weakness, a permanent watering. There were no real tears left in them. Edward, her son, had not wanted to go to Vietnam. His father, Steve, had not wanted to go to Germany before him. But the father, Steve, had returned.

"I called you: Stephen. Darling. My husband. Your father. Your grandfather . . . . We were lucky to have, late in life, two children? Edward dead and Janet living dead.

"And I found that I could love another, and you never knew. The wheels of time ground it away." But Steve had lost the final battle—with cancer. The knife cut into the apple, excising a dark stain.

Edward had burned his draft card on the courthouse lawn with ten other boys.

"You weren't *with* them?"

"I was. I don't *believe* in this war."

"You don't understand it. It's a *new* kind of war."

"I don't *believe* in violence."

"What *do* you believe in?"

"Peace."

"Sometimes you must *fight* for what you believe in."

"I want peace."

"There is no peace without honor."

But Edward went; and he died there. The remembered, bitter pain stabbed her heart. Without honor! His countrymen thought he should not even have been there.

Janet had not wanted to go to college. Fair-haired Janet. Ellen touched her temple with a wavering stick of a finger, brushing back a wisp of fragile hair. "My hair . . . at one time . . . ." Busy Janet. Never enough time. Enough was never enough to do. Too busy with people and causes and that job in the dark ghetto. What did she seek in that early marriage? Made in Heaven. Karl, her husband, had seemed utterly foreign. Spicy. Unkempt. Slovenly. Hidden.

Karl had gone to college. Two years. He had been bitten by a police dog, on the leg, in a riot. "An ignominous thing." She had kept the thought to herself.

"Why were you rioting?"

"We weren't rioting, only protesting."

"Why?"

"They wouldn't listen to us."

"Why should they?"

"Because we have ideas."

"What ideas?"

"To change the world!"

"Protesting and violence is no change."

Janet had thought Karl was Sir Galahad. But Ellen knew Sir Galahad too well. It was not he! Why had she not stopped it? She had not known how. She had thought marriages were made in Heaven, and youth did not rot.

Ellen carefully peeled the nub of the fruit, exposing a rotten core. "Oh, dear." She looked down at the boy. "Well, we'll cut it into pieces." She firmed the wilted flower of her mouth. "We'll *quarter* it. Do you know what that means?"

"I don't like it cut up!"

Ellen's head quivered on her bony shoulders. "It will be just as good," she said staunchly, pulling the sharpness of her chin into the recesses of her neck.

"I don't want it."

Ellen laid the apple and the knife and her hands, trembling, upon the counter. "That's a waste," she said, quietly. "A waste." The faint, winnowing rays of the sun moved in her wisps of hair; the bowed head shook of itself.

"It's rotten!"

Ellen took a despairing breath. "But there's some good in it; we must save the good." Where was Janet? God only knew. The placards read: "There is no God!" "God is dead!" Divorce was a foreign land. And desertion came before divorce in that no man's land between right and wrong. Janet had not found what she sought in that early marriage.

Karl had said she was addicted to heroin . . . .

"I'll peel another," Ellen said with an infinitely wearied sigh. "The dope was what kept her away; what kept them apart. It stood between them. Gentle, fair Janet. Busy Janet. What did you find in your marriage? Made in Heaven."

"Karl tells me when he sends me money: "this much I care for my son." Janet does not send me anything. Ellen turned her head, a slow, creaking movement. She looked down at the boy, with her sunken eyes. "How could you let him go? This, the very heart of you!"

With one grimy hand the boy reached to grasp the exposed flesh of the apple, and sunk sharp little pure-white teeth carefully, carefully into its flesh, avoicing its dark interior.

"I want it whole. There's some good in it, gramma."

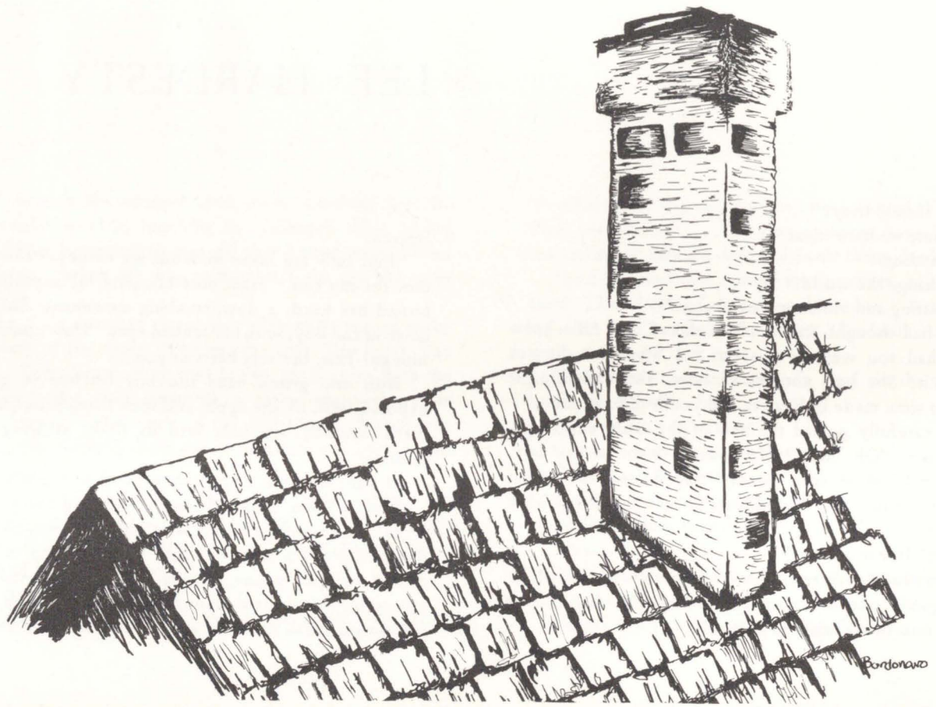
"Yes." Ellen spoke slowly, a withered hand reaching. "Yes." She touched his fair hair, soft as down. Silk "Yes." She straightened a little "There is some good in it." She turned to that young girl she only remembered. With a splintering of ice into wounded flesh, she melted. "I have not changed! Do I dare try again? And do I have time?"

Marj Rowland

I've found some time
To sit and ponder what
Your being away says to me.
I like what I hear.
It says I'm whole and full
At the same time that a place with
Your name on it remains empty.

I forgot to tell you . . .

You know the tavern dream–
The place apart
With quiet booth
And glowing candle.
Black bread and cheese.
Some meat and beer–
On the red-white tablecloth.
The place where I meet myself.
I forgot to tell you . . .
There's room for two.



After Hours and Hours

A full-blown
tight-lipped barmaid
fills incandescent glasses
with splashes of loose love.

The thin glisteny streams
strain for hours.
We are a violent combination in repose;
the black light makes your teeth glow.

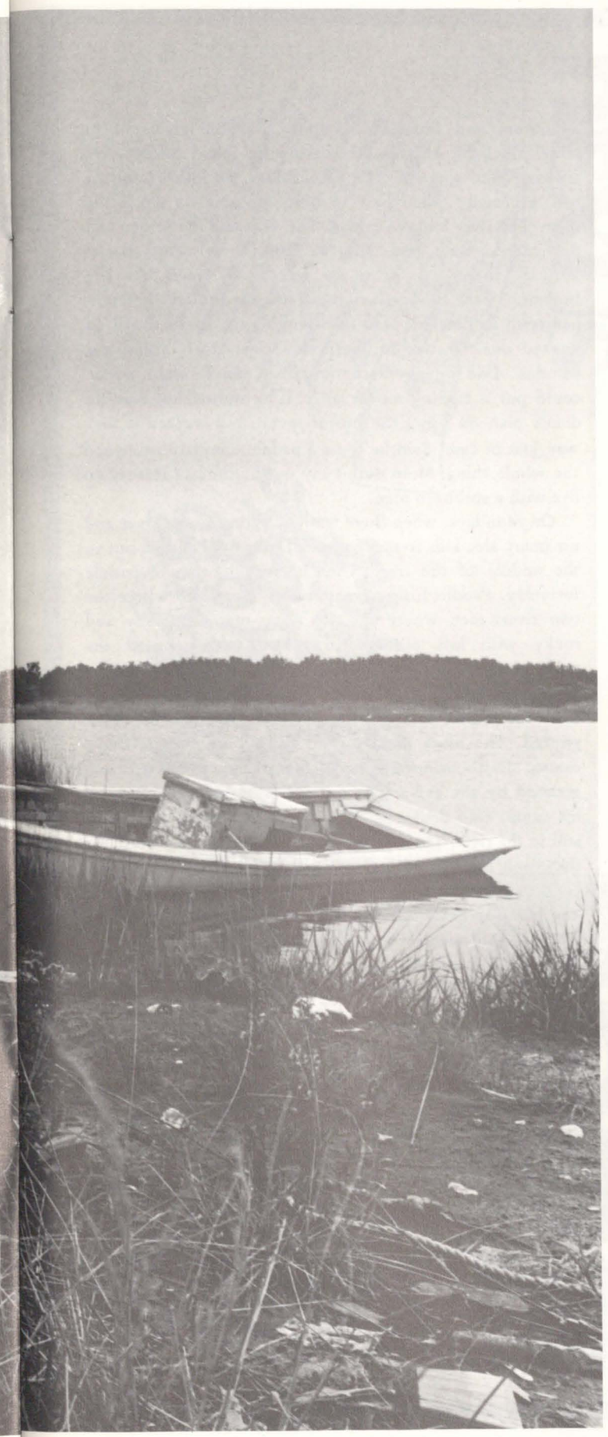
Bleak promises are muffled in bar padding.
The night body will see all of her children home
eventually,
indiscriminately.

A circle of left-over, lone, empty lovers
shifts its collective eye
and desperately attacks the air
with flippant gestures.

Fingers splinter the keys on the juke-box.
It is all
the same
tune

like the words that bubble, break and freeze,
remake themselves with liquid urgency
again and again
until the night body
carries them
home.

Molly Bordonaro



DAD

by Carol A. Ferree

Leonard Wilson stood on the bridge flicking cigarette ashes into the water, then spitting into the water. He leaned on the rusted railing. It was loose, so he gave up and just stood there. He watched the current make the water slap the bank. The river. The river and the bridge. The river and the bridge and the rowboat. Suddenly he turned to look at the bank. Relief. The rowboat was still there, red and yellow, turned over where they'd left it, halfway up the bank. Paint was peeling now, oars propped up between the double trunk of the ash tree. Probably should be burned.

Maybe it was too wet or something.

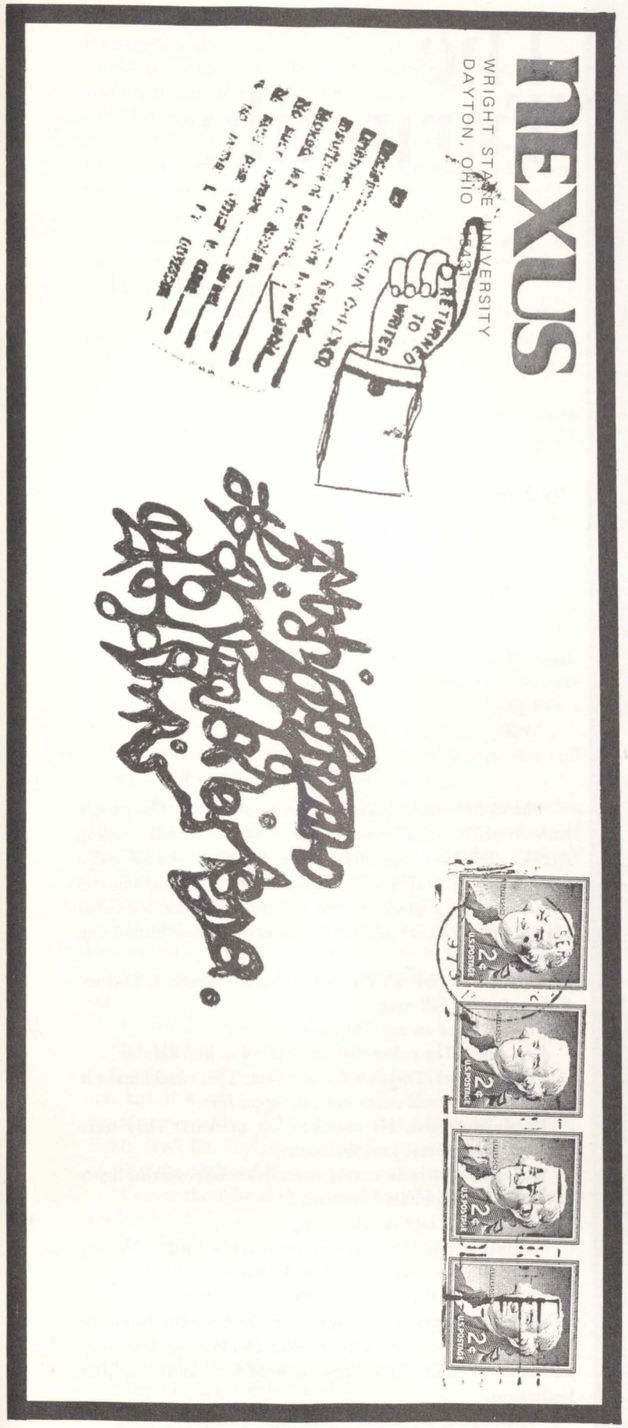
Leonard remembered the first time he and Dad had used the rowboat. Paint hadn't been peeling then. They had rolled across the river, kitty corner to the bridge, by some weeds and logs on the end of the little island. Dad said it was a good spot for rock bass. Only other good spot was up by the bridge on the river side. Creek side was too shallow. Dad said just to drop the line in and reel it up a little and sooner or later a little rock bass would snatch at the bait. What had they used for bait? Worms dug up by the sewer near the play yard? Or minnows seined from up the creek? Oh well—at least he'd caught a fish, his first, a little rock bass. It had been about six inches long, kind of a weedy yellow green in the late afternoon sun. Dying, it had flopped over a couple of times, gills flaring, its last meal on a hook inside. When it was dead, its eyes were opaque, like gray smoked glass. Where had its eyes gone? Leonard had been so excited over the fish, he'd lost his sailor hat in the river. But it had been too late to grab it. The evil spirit of the river. The evil spirit of the river had taken it. He had reached up his hand through the silty bottom of the river and pulled the yellow sailor hat down through the murk and put it on his head. That's what Leonard had believed because that's what Dad had told him. Dad said that now they'd have to buy a new sailor hat and repaint the boat. But they never got around to repainting the boat or buying a new sailor hat. They had pulled the row boat up on the bank and turned it over and left it there.

Leonard threw the cigarette into the water. Dirty old water. Weren't any fish in it anymore except filthy carp. Why would anyone want to eat carp? Filthy carp. Or even worse, catfish and eels. The Indians used to eat the eels in the river a couple of centuries ago. Dad. Dad and his Indians. Dad and his Indians and his fishing. Dad told Leonard that LaSalle had camped on the big island across the river from the bridge. Dad said LaSalle had eaten eels with the Indians. He certainly must have eaten bass too. Dad had eaten bass. LaSalle had eaten bass. Dad. Dad and LaSalle. Dad and LaSalle were both dead. Dead. And Dad still in the river. The divers dredged and dived. Dredged and dived. But they hadn't found him yet. Dad was still someplace in the river. Probably upstream where the two rivers met.

Leonard lit another cigarette. Dad. Dad and his Indians. Dad and his Indians and canoes. About a month ago he and Dad had gone down to Shorty's Marina. Said he wanted to buy a canoe. Dad told Leonard he was tired of his green metal john boat. Said he wanted a canoe. Said he preferred birch bark. Birch bark. Birch bark and aluminum. Birch bark and aluminum and fiberglass. Canoes are made out of aluminum and fiberglass anymore. Said he preferred to travel like the Indians. Of course he joked Shorty. He always joked someone. He joked Mom. He joked Leonard too, especially when he had been growing up along the river. The river and the bridge. The river and the bridge and the canoe. Dad gave Shorty $300.00 in saved Social Security money to prove he wanted to travel like the Indians. On-the-spot cash to travel like the Indians. Leonard had tried to dissuade Dad from buying the canoe, but Dad wanted one. He was stubborn as a cigar store Indian was wooden. Dad bought a canoe with a square stern, so he could put a trolling motor on it if he wanted to. Said he didn't plan on using the motor much, but wanted it that way just in case. Said he'd use a paddle. Leonard protested the whole thing. Mom didn't say much. She had learned to live with a stubborn man.

On Mondays, when there wasn't anyone on the river and no smart alec kids to make waves, Dad would paddle out to the middle of the river. Then he would begin to paddle furiously. Paddle furiously upstream. Upstream where the two rivers met. Where the two rivers met was rushy and rocky with lots of undertow. Dad told Leonard the turbulence was caused by the evil spirit of the river and his tribe making war preparations. This Monday Dad paddled too close. Too close to the whirling murk. The murk swirled. The murk swirled Dad toward its center. Dad's canoe. Dad's canoe capsized. Capsized, and Dad was grabbed by the evil spirit of the river and carried away to his camp. Dad drowned. Dad drowned and his body was still in the river. The divers couldn't find him. Why couldn't they find him? They found his hat. Dad's hat. The brown plaid one with the pheasant feather that Leonard had sent him from up in Canada when he was on his last fishing trip. Why had Dad used it for a fishing hat?

Leonard threw the second cigarette butt into the water. He would get Dad's prized arrowhead collection. The State Historical Society had proclaimed it to be one of the best in the state. Trees. Trees shrugged off leaves. The trees clung to their life on the bank. Had anyone ever told them to die? Useless trees. Useless life. Die. Die. Die. Leonard angrily threw his cigarettes into the river. Dirty old river. Useless life. Was his a useless life? Had Dad's life been useless? How could one determine uselessness? In senseless death? Out of the corner of his eye, Leonard saw a log floating downstream close to shore. As it came more closely into view, Leonard could see that it was white. White and waterlogged. Waterlogged from having been in the river too long. It bobbed and floated. The log bobbed and floated. It bobbed and floated toward the shore. It bobbed and floated and had a shirt on. O God! O God! O God! Dad.



Prophet Sharing

by Ron Layne

Our meeting was strange, in a queer sort of way. It is not often I meet a voluptuous blonde creature searching through a bookstore for a copy of *The Prophet*. That is how we met and how, only too soon, I would lose her.

We exchanged hello's and searched each other's innerselves. She smiled and said, "I love you." It was then that I knew I loved her too.

"I am an itinerant farm worker and can offer you nothing," I said, drawing her close to me. "I like corn on the cob," she replied. "Shucks," I added.

That night in her tiny apartment (romantic stories always have a tiny apartment), she wanted to make popcorn and I wanted to make love. I settled for popcorn. I kissed her salty lips with mine and whispered, "I want to asSALT you."

"And I thought you were trying to butter me up," she retaliated. Such were our days together, filled with laughter and popcorn hulls.

It was Saturday in the park, appropriately in Chicago. We coerced with nature and copulated with each other. We were lying on a rock when I shot mine. "You are everything to me," she said.

"What can I say?" I said.

We walked miles through trees and autumn leaves. I pushed her into a pile of leaves. "Leaf me alone," she shouted. We laughed and kissed as young lovers often do.

That night as we watched *Love Story* on her television, I told her the truth about me. "I don't go to Harvard and I hate lawyers." I confessed.

"That's all right," she reassured me, "I didn't go to Radcliffe and don't have a fatal disease."

She called me her lover and I called her my nympho. She told me that when I was inside her she felt complete bliss. The next day I took a pair of my BVD's and printed BLISTIK on the front. She fell out of bed when she saw them. I thought we would last forever.

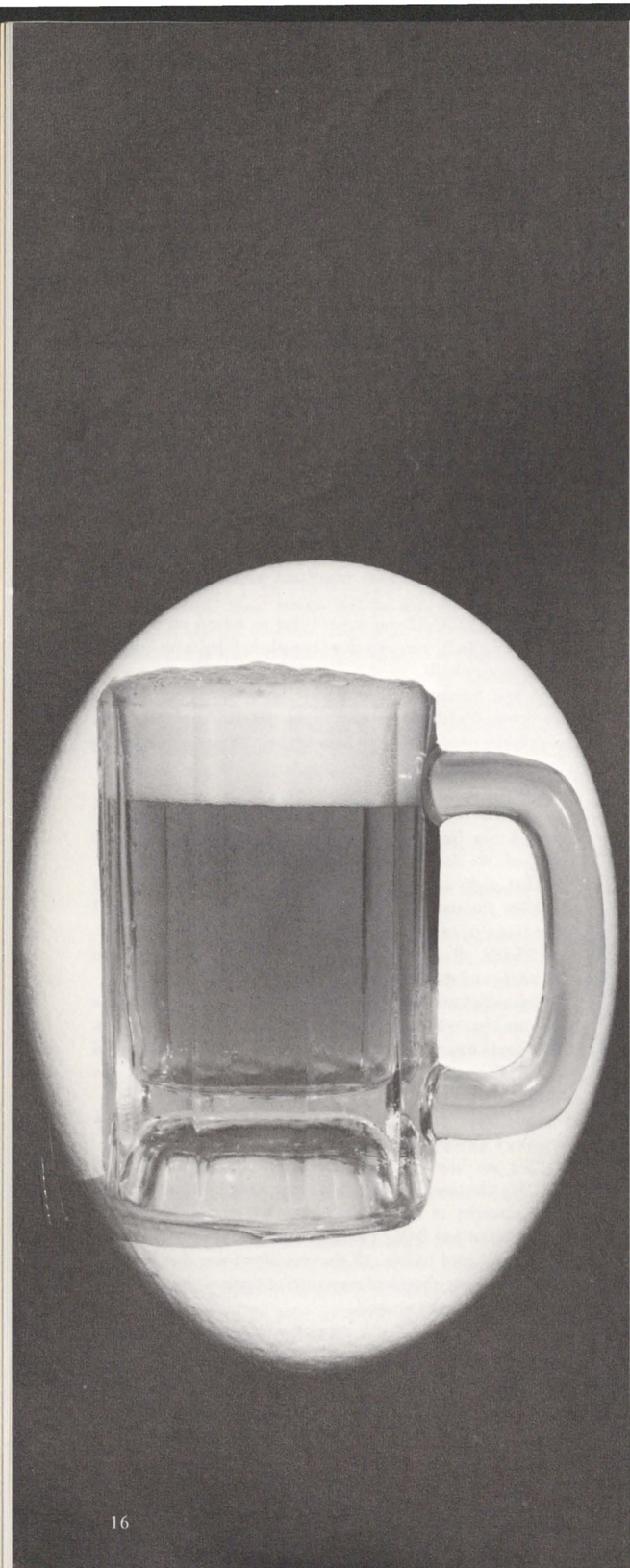
One day I entered her apartment and noticed she was wearing a new pair of Levi's. "You've changed," I said.

"We are like my other jeans," she answered, "washed up." We chuckled as though it were a big joke, but I noted some sincerity in her words. I knew we were drifting apart.

I entered her living room the next day, only to find it empty and void of life. All that remained was that book by Gibran and my cherished memories. I opened the cover and read her last words to me.

"It seems your Blistik turned into a Chapstik for me. You began to rub me the wrong way. So stick it! Yours forever, Anonymous."

A love was lost but something was gained. If I should ever figure out what was gained, I'll write the sequel.



The Turnstile

by Stephen Woodward

The tavern was a place of moving shadows. The people moved; their heads moved; their hands moved, trailing streaks of lighted cigarettes in the darkness. The air was a solid block of gray smoke, broken only by coughing and occasional sharp laughter. Throughout the room, ice cubes played hollow tunes against the sides of glasses, but no one listened.

Three men sat at the bar, drinking beers. O'Mallory frowned at his full mug.

"I wish I had an egg," he said.

"An egg?" The other two men stared at him blankly.

"For my beer. I want it for my beer. That would make it perfect. That would make everything perfect."

Bezzle shrugged. He searched his pockets. They were empty. "How about you, Wallinsky?"

Wallinsky was now staring mutely at the revolving lights of a beer display behind the bar.

"Wallinsky," said Bezzle again.

Wallinsky was now glaring stubbornly at the turning colors of the beer display behind the bar.

"Wallinsky," threatened Bezzle.

Wallinsky groaned in resignation. He carefully lifted his leather cap and rescued a huge white chicken egg from atop his nest of hair. O'Mallory snatched it away without hesitation.

"Thank you, my friend," said the Irishman, grinning.

Wallinsky turned away with tears in his eyes. "That was for my wife," he said.

"Come, come," said Bezzle in a soothing gurgle. "Don't you remember? You don't have a wife."

"That egg was for my wife," Wallinsky repeated. "You can't possibly understand. You don't know how much she hates eggs. And if I can't bring that egg home with me, how can I possibly make her miserable?"

"That's a problem, isn't it?" said Bezzle.

Wallinsky wiped a quick sleeve across his eyes. He looked at Bezzle. "You do understand, don't you?"

The other man nodded. "What are friends for?"

A smile cut Wallinsky's face like a knife in a watermelon. He shoved his nose in his glass, leaned back, and poured the beer through his teeth. Bezzle watched with mild amusement.

"Yes," said Wallinsky, "you're like a son to me. I guess you know my wife and I don't have any children. She and I had always planned on having children, but—"

"But—?"

"But our only son talked us out of it."

"Which one?"

"Our oldest."

"Ah, yes, he always was a scoundrel, wasn't he?"

Wallinsky chuckled and held his large hands to his face. "Sometimes worse," he said.

Bezzle excused himself to go to the restroom. He made his way through the jungle of dancing couples to the far end of the room, where a glowing green sign hung like a nightmare in the smoky darkness. The sign said "MEN."

Wallinsky turned to O'Mallory. The Irishman was still trying to put Wallinsky's egg in his beer mug.

"Look at that," said O'Mallory. The huge egg was resting on the rim of the mug. "It won't fit," he said, as if Wallinsky couldn't see for himself. "It's too big. It won't fit. And now I wish you'd tell me how I'm going to have a perfect beer if the egg won't fit."

Wallinsky tried to think of something appropriate to say. He was still trying when Bezzle returned to the bar.

"Look at that," said O'Mallory, holding up his mug and egg.

"It won't fit," said Bezzle, nodding.

"It's too big," explained O'Mallory.

Bezzle thought for a second. "If I were you—not that I am, but if I were—I'd be scientific about it. I think I'd measure everything with a ruler first. After all, measurements don't lie. And, well, uh—who knows, you might find out that the egg's smaller than the mug after all."

"I never thought of that," said O'Mallory. "Do you have a ruler?"

"Yes, but it's covered with lines and numbers."

"That's all right," said O'Mallory.

O'Mallory measured the circumference of the egg, then the circumference of the mug rim. He raised his eyebrows in surprise. "Why, you were right, Bezzle. The egg is three inches smaller than the mug. Can you believe that?"

"Anything's possible," said Bezzle.

They both contemplated the egg for many minutes, until Wallinsky unexpectedly cleared his throat. "Where did everyone go?" he asked.

The other men turned and looked. The tavern was empty, silent. Hundreds of glasses and ash trays lay tipped over on the tables. The lights were turned off. A thick dust had begun to settle over all the furniture. Wallinsky began to whimper.

"Looks like there's no one here," said Bezzle.

The other men agreed. Then they were silent.

"Try the egg now," said Bezzle cheerfully.

O'Mallory shook his head. "No sense in it now."

"Come on, be a sport."

O'Mallory sighed. He tiredly dropped the egg into his beer mug. It stuck halfway into the mouth of the glass.

Bezzle and Wallinsky watched O'Mallory's beer without moving. They put their chins on their hands.

"Something's wrong," said Wallinsky.

They nodded at the quiet walls.

Bezzle suddenly jumped up in glee. "I know what it is," he grinned. "Here, O'Mallory, you sit on Wallinsky's seat, and I'll sit on yours, and Wallinsky'll sit on mine."

"Of course, of course," sang Wallinsky. He clapped his hands.

The three men changed seats. They sat. They waited.

And they waited.

"This isn't working," said O'Mallory at last. "What should we do now?"

Bezzle thought for a second. "I think I know. Wallinsky, you sit on O'Mallory's seat, O'Mallory'll sit on my seat, and I'll sit on Wallinsky's."

The three men changed seats again. They became even more uncomfortable.

"It must be getting late," said Wallinsky. "That must be why everyone left."

He looked at his watch. He shook his wrist. "Funny, my watch has stopped."

The other men looked at their watches and shook their wrists also. Bezzle folded his arms and said, "I don't think we'll be able to leave here tonight."

"Well, what about tomorrow?" asked Wallinsky.

"I'm afraid not," said Bezzle with slight annoyance. "Or the next day or the next or forever. I don't think we can ever leave."

"But what about my wife? She's alone. She needs me."

Bezzle chuckled. "But don't you remember, Wallinsky? You don't have a wife. There's nothing more to say."

Wallinsky buried his face in his hands. "Oh, my God," he sobbed. "Oh, my God, my God, my God. How can I leave her? How can I be so cruel?"

Bezzle opened his mouth to answer, but O'Mallory cut him short with a yell.

"Hey, look at that!" said the Irishman, holding up his mug. Upside down, in the warm brown beer, Wallinsky's egg was floating. "Hey can you believe it? I finally got it in."

He beamed proudly at his drink. Bezzle slapped him on the back and laughed. Bezzle narrowed his eyes.

"Now how are you going to get it out?" said Bezzle.

Poem for an Obscene Phone Caller

For you,
man who gave me his early morning breath,
reeking of curses for me and our
mothers: this is for you.
You,
with the epithet,
hurled like a hammer,
you with the sigh that you
blew through my telephone,
that you blew across all of that distance between us.
Are we so far away from you, we women?
Do you believe that the alabaster
face, that the permanent smile on the billboard is us?
Can't you conceive of crazy women,
shrieking, silent, lost in their
outpourings, their echoing hospital gowns?
(so much like the crazy men, do you see?)
do you see, do you see, do you see what I give you:
a flower since you stand in your desert,
an arrow to point you away.

SUSAN

Mothers Are Just the Other Side of Daughters

She gets nervous, I
know, whenever her
daughters start
rising above that
resistance. We'll all be
remarkable, Mother
we say with our
every new ribbon &
dash out the
door, and she
only puts on a
smile that's twisted somehow and
almost
ugly.
Well, yes,
she says
and she turns on the
water and it speeds down like arrows and then
floats up crazy, some getting in
her hair.

Celebrating My Twenty-Second

I'm such a sneak, grinning
in my same old chair & blowing
out the candles on someone else's birthday cake.
I'm really trying to blow the
masks off those munching
imposters who've slipt into the
family
place & most
especially into my daddy's
shoes.

oh god if I could blow away that
dust

Pardon You Must Have Mistook Me

pardon you must have mistook me
for a red rubber ball the way you throw me
around no
I guess you must think I'm some
putty (leftover) & you
keep on rolling me all the way
down yes
I swear you
must certainly have took me for a
robot so you
always charge up the
wiring no
I can't figure out what you
take me for but that's all
right just
take me

SCIBETTA

rock and rolling

I wish you wouldn't be so electric,
it's always such a shock.
I mean, here I come home,
trailing across the sidewalk,
avoiding the wet spots,
over the Welcome mat and under the front
door, snaking across the linoleum,
hauling my briefcase along with my
toes,
having worn my skiing socks to work and melted at the office.

So I crawl up a chair leg like some creeping vine
or maybe the scourge of
mahogany—you know, some kind of dreaded disease,
and I can't help but perk up a little the
way you sit there across the table and blow me up like an
inflatable chair. So
then you come over here
and plunk yourself down,
it's lovely to rock and
roll, rolling together,
it's lovely to carry
you, hey,
let's get a waterbed.

boys

boys are sneaky, faraway,
always wanting you, to impress their
friends who come sliding up the
stairs in their various states of
drunkenness. they

lay beside you, hand at
breast, exclaiming at the
tiny point that parallels their
own sudden surges. oh,

boys are fickle, faraway,
and as the evenings turn they
change into their other
faces and continue plucking at your
breast, groping all about inside
you, while below, downstairs, their
friends, the
band,
keeps playing.

The Scream of Silence

by Marilyn Rowand

I

A hush had fallen over the well-manicured lawns of the suburban street. Arthur Bennett looked at his wife, across the breakfast table, and pounded on it until the coffee cups had spilled in darkening stains over the fresh, white tablecloth.

"Damn it, Ann; I tell you they're all out to get me!"

Ann sighed; she was used to his paranoiac outbursts, but deathly wearied by them.

"Arthur, they are not 'out to get you,' can't you understand that? When are you going to see Dr. Jamieson? He can help, I'm sure."

"Jamieson? Jamieson, that shrink friend of yours? You're against me too, aren't you? My own wife!"

"But, darling . . ."

"Don't try to butter me up, damn it!"

"Arthur, this wife knows you've lost your job because THEY were all against you."

"I didn't lose my job, I quit, dammit!"

"And what are we going to do when all our savings are gone? We have to face the fact that you are without work; and we need help."

"We? What kind of help do I get from you? I don't call it help when you take everyone's side against me; and as far as the job goes, you know that bastard, Henderson, was after my job from the first day they made him my assistant. Assistant hell!"

"Arthur, Bob Henderson is a fine boy. We've known him since he was a child; and you and I both know he's not the type of person to do such a thing."

"I've had it! Why isn't the window shade down. I've told you and told you to keep the blind down. Too many nosey neighbors!"

"But it's a beautiful day. Look, Arthur, look how lovely the sunshine is. No-one is watching."

He got up from the table. Ann knew his next move. He'd climb the stairs, lock the bedroom door, and sulk there until night. What has happened to him, to us, to this marriage, she wondered. Perhaps if they had had children they could see how he has changed and give her some advice. She was too close to the problem and much too far from the solution. The minister tried, but it was useless. Arthur wouldn't discuss anything with him; and when he found out Ann had even mentioned it to him, he went into one of his rages.

She rose from the table and its stained cloth and methodically began to clean up the kitchen.

She thought perhaps she should discuss it with the few relatives they had, but discounted that idea. They were all too far away—too wrapped up in their own lives. She and Arthur were lucky to get a Christmas card from them each year. And the shame of it all! No. It wouldn't do.

Much later, after they had retired for the night, she awakened; the bed was empty except for Ann. She knew Arthur was on his nightly rounds—checking doors to make sure they were locked and windows to make sure the blinds were down. Hot tears trickled their way to the pillowcase. She prayed, silently; the prayers were never answered. I must get a job, she thought, but it's been twenty years since I worked as a legal secretary. Could I stand the pace? Remember the shorthand?

The door swung open quietly; and Arthur slipped into bed beside her. Her tears continued, unnoticed, and made their way to the already wet pillowcase.

Ann awakened to the drip, drip, drip of the rain off the eaves. Arthur slept, curled up in a ball on his side. Morning. She dreaded the senseless repetition of the new day, but rose silently to begin breakfast and another day of Hell.

A short while later she called to him from the foot of the stairs; "Arthur, darling, breakfast is ready!"

"Let me be. I'm not hungry."

"But you can't hide there forever. For God's sake, get hold of yourself."

When he finally came down he was dressed and had a suitcase in his hand.

"Where? what? . . .". she started to sputter.

Ignoring her shocked expression, he strode toward her and handed her a stack of bills. "I'm leaving, and I won't be back until you come to your senses," he said.

"But where will you go?"

"I don't know. I'll write you when I find out. You're one of THEM now, Ann. I was sick all night. You're doing something to my food. How could you? You, the only one I could trust?"

"But I wouldn't . . . ." The door slammed behind him, and she watched him shuffle down the walk. She remembered the shy, sensitive young man she had married and cried until no more tears would come.

II

A shudder racked the landlady's immense body as she climbed the last section of steps which led to Arthur Bennett's third-floor room. She clutched the telegram which was already dampened by her sweating hand and made her way down the dirty, chalk-white hallway.

She raised her hand and tapped lightly on Bennett's door and heard a shuffling noise slowly approaching her. The door opened just enough to allow the hoarse, yet whispery voice to reach her.

"What do you want?"

She moved back a little. "It's a messenger."

"What about?"

She shifted her weight on her massive legs. "He's gone now. Left ya' a telegram." She saw that the door was opened as far as the night chain would allow.

"Well, pass it through!"

Her hand trembled slightly as it approached the black opening. When the telegram was half-way through, the man grabbed it rudely from her hand and slammed the door.

She stared at the door's stark whiteness and heard the shuffling sounds grow fainter, as the strange man moved within.

Her hated task completed now, the old woman was beginning to feel brave. She mumbled out loud, softly at first, then louder and louder as she descended the steps. "It's creepy, I tell ya! Never see him go out of that room; never has any visitors; never opens the door any further than that chain; never has a light on . . . ." She rambled on and on as if it would help clear up the mystery that was Arthur Bennett; and she wondered what was in the telegram.

On a round, black table a pile of letters, returned unopened, lay. Bennett stood near the window. There were no windows staring into his privacy; he looked out and saw only the red and blue bulbs of a gigantic theater marquee. Dressed in a pair of black pajamas, his head, bald except for a fringe of graying, brown hair, was bent over as he stared at the yellow envelope in his hand. He whimpered and threw it on the table next to the pile of unopened letters, then shuffled over to the bed with its black cover and curled up on his side, hugging his knees against his chest. Looking at the wall, the last of the walls he had painted, he whimpered again. The entire room was black. Black, the way he wanted it to be: ceiling, floor, bed, curtains; it had taken him many hours, but it was worth those hours. The blackness served to comfort him. A soft, velvet black—his comfort!

He rolled over and stared at the stack of unopened letters on the table and, next to them, the telegram. Every letter he had written to her said the same thing. He remembered every word. Each one said, "Ann, I'm sorry if I hurt you. I want to come back to you. I love you. I'm your husband—help me." And each time he wrote one, it came back unopened, with Ann's handwritten, "Return to Sender," on the envelope. With each letter's return, he painted a wall, or the floor, or the ceiling, or the table, black—until now only the window and its frame were untouched.

Bennett stayed on the bed the entire day. Dusk was diminishing the amount of light within his world. The lights from the marquee began to blink on and off, on and off. The telegram appeared and disappeared, appeared and disappeared. Bennett's eyes began to water, and the tears began to trickle toward his temples. He knew he must read the telegram. If only Ann would take him back, he'd show her what a thoughtful man he could be. And he'd stop having crying spells. And he wouldn't be violent when he couldn't have his own way. And he just might let THAT doctor talk to him, just to please Ann, his wife for 28 years. Ann, his love. Perhaps, he thought, if I could have given her a child; but it is too late now for many things I might have done.

He rose from the bed and walked toward the table—and the unopened telegram. His face changed color with the lights from the marquee. Red face. Blue face. Red face. Blue face. Too much light! Must open the envelope! Ann's waiting for me to come home. Tear it open. Stop shaking. Hold it to the window. Red words—Arthur, I am; blue words—filing for divorce. Red words—leave me alone; Blue words—forever! Ann.

He moved away from the table. The tears had stopped now. He felt around in a corner and returned to the window with his can of black paint and his brush. Slowly, smoothly, sailed the brush. First the frame, then the sill, and now the window pane.

The blood light reflected his face a final time, as he completed his darkest task.

Stephen Woodward

Sunday Afternoon

The eyes of the wooden owl
tick back and forth
with each swing of the pendulum.
My dog stands shivering, white,
while I listen,
leaning on the Lucy table,
plucking silent lint from the air.

The Lucy table stands
on griffins clutching crystal balls.
The man who made it
rode a horse, and wore
great callouses on his hands.
And now the table stands
before a picture window
and a mirror,
reflected in the sky.

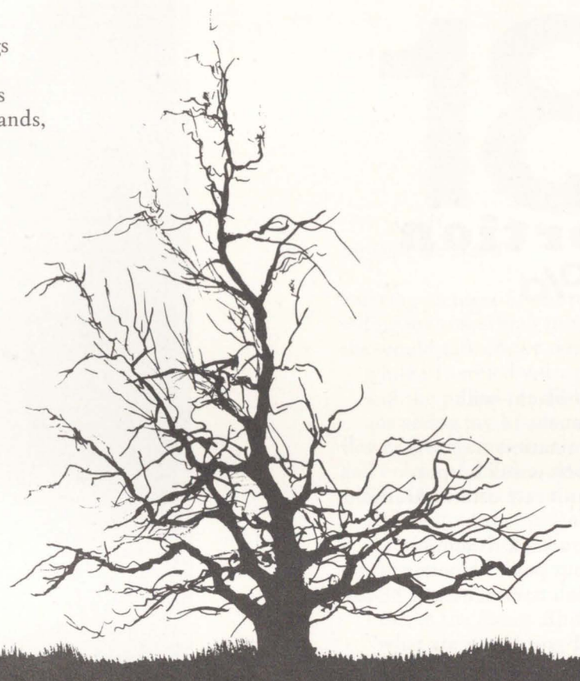
Now and then
the silence breaks
with the shrieking of griffins,
the ticking of eyes,
the wild frenzy of my dog.
But I just lean and watch
and brush the dust away.

I'm Wearing a Jacket

I'm wearing a jacket by Christian Dior:
I wear it to keep me from killing some more
People, like the ones I made lie on the floor
In that Houston grocery store
And shot one by one till there weren't any more.
And now when they ask what I'm in this place for,
I say: I'm wearing a jacket by Christian Dior.

Asparagus

Asparagus grows in plastic pots
that hang from bedroom ceilings
in the night.
Its black lace drops
to encircle the air with spider hands,
which weave the moonlight
into shattered glass. It
drops
to bind your trembling face
against the pillow.



The Swatting of Flies

We swatted flies; and
we swatted flies.
We trudged around

the redwood bench
with our swatters,
swatting. And the world

seemed only a speck
on a board in that
park, buzzing from knot

to knot in the wood,
shrinking from the curious
firmness in our jaws.

Marc Chagall's Paintings of Love

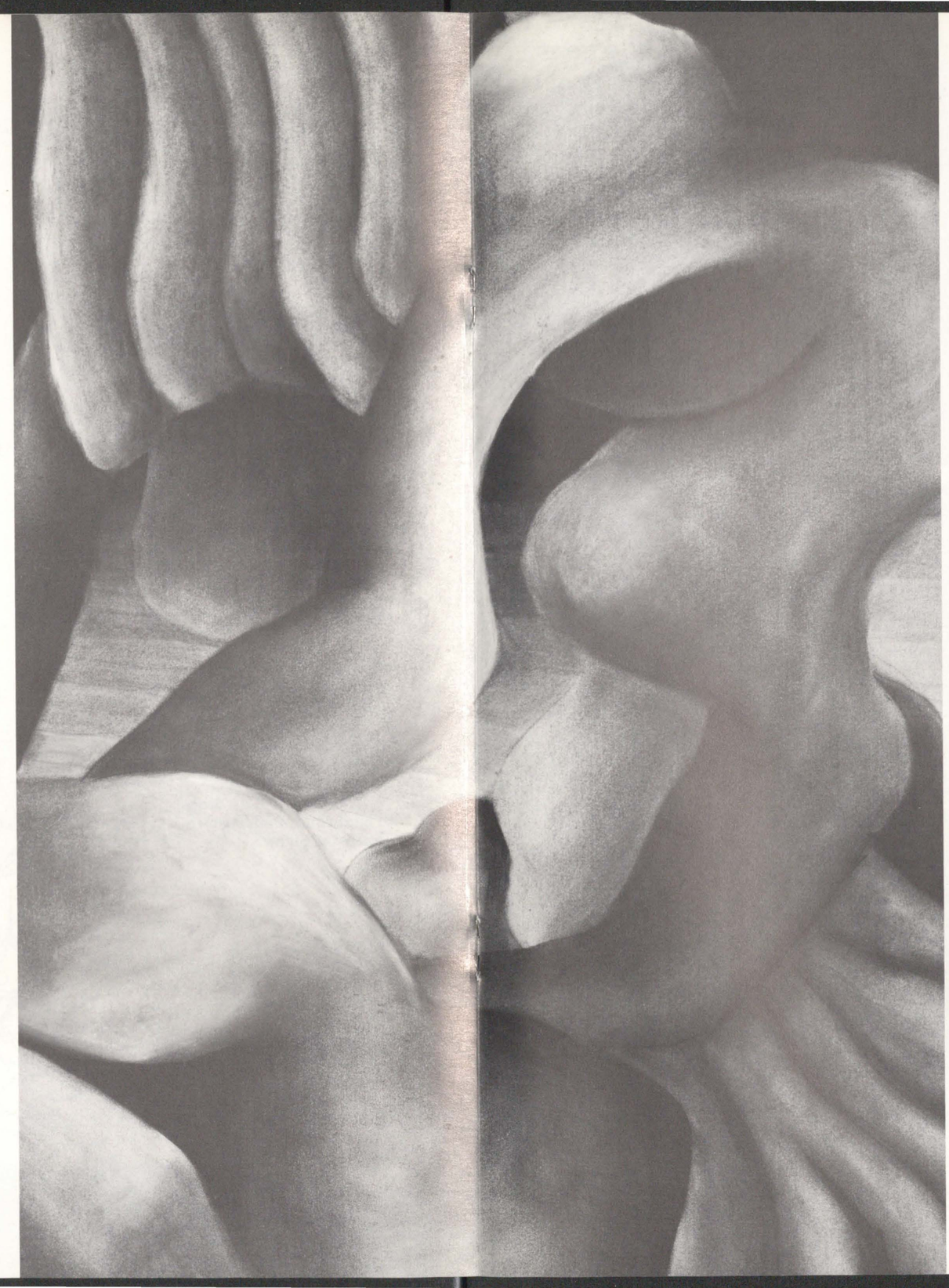
by J. R. Alley

He carries her by her breast.
She lives in his shoes.
He puts his arm around her
shoulders so they won't fly off.
She had planted flowers in her ears—
an anniversary on the side of her
head.
They flew over housetops together—
some kind of conjugal bird.
The sky licked their backs, he strained
his neck, she ran her hose.
The wallpaper in their room is
always wildly patterned and
the beds always tightly made.
She eats his breakfast.
He butters her toast.

total distortion .025%

by Bonnie Evans

Anodized gold and black—with
special gold/teal panel
nomenclature illumination
high level: 95 dB below full output
nominal peak unlimit rate attack threshold
front panel variable
nominal amplitude attack threshold
.2 volts peak at input peak unlimiter
downward expansion commences at-35 dB
ultimate limit is 41 dB
Joystick controlled
power consumption; preamplifier; 40 watts
warranty: three years, parts and labor.



Somp

by jackson

sitting on my pelvis
slender back covered by flowing hair
sensual rhythms
of ecstasies and novel sensations

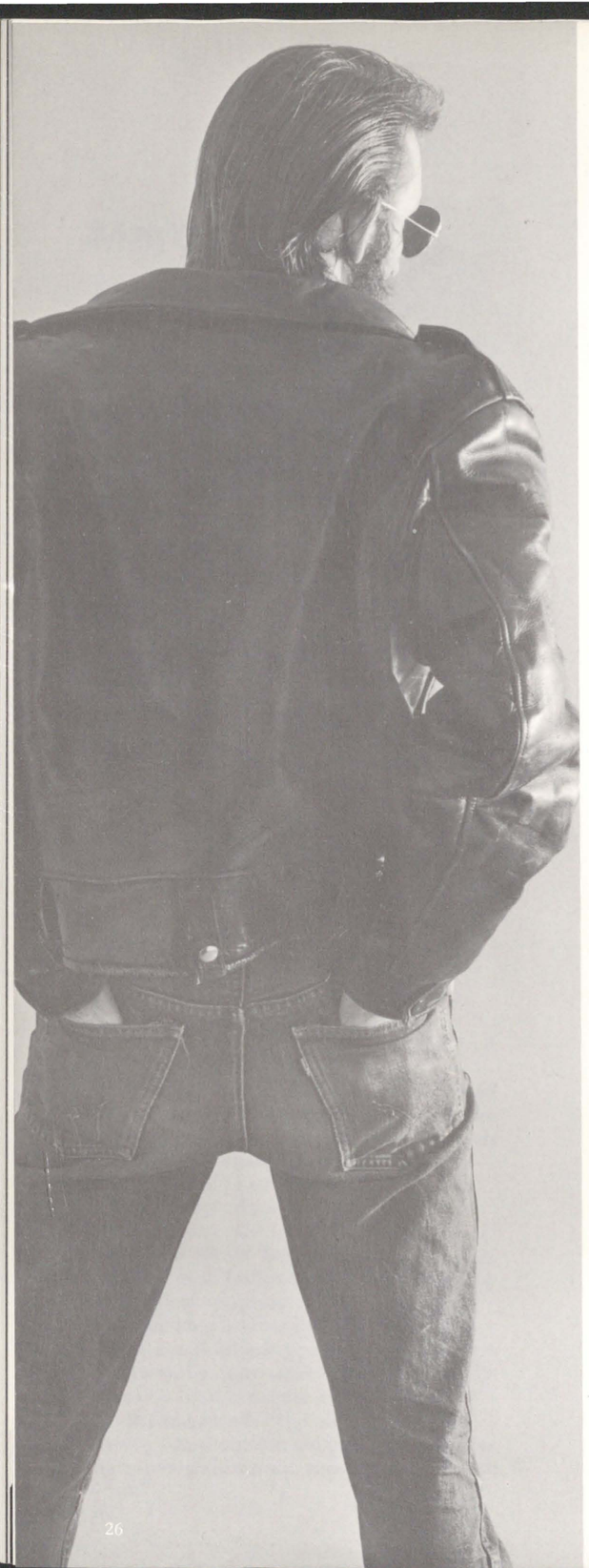
certain shiftings
give perspective to a side-view
of a supple breast
adorned by an erect nipple
pointing to the wind

heavy breathing from a flush body
grabbing my leg
a jolt shoots through her essence
uttering goddd ddamnn
in a painful tone
she looks heavenward in exhaustion
for her messiah has come

18

by Don McCrabb

Painting pictures of churches and white lace
selling me something out of McCalls
she would talk about our wedding,
while I fumbled with plastic buttons
and she pulled me closer
answering my kisses with
flower arrangements
and colors of dresses, and
Oh, Hell! the zipper's stuck!
feeling my heart pulsating,
she wrapped herself around me with
receptions and flower girls and
a honeymoon in Florida, and
I broke the damn zipper,
"what are you doing?" she screamed.
My body aching like a tense bow
she would talk about our wedding



Teen Angel in the Making
(a radio poem)

by Susan Scibetta

(chorus):
oh rockabye warble,
oh class rings sent flying,
oh last tender kisses in mud and despair,
oh girls sent to heaven
for riding jalopies
on train tracks and just sitting there.

well,
that old locomotive
sneaks up on them lovers
as they sit discussing the earth and the stars,
they don't hear the whistle, no
don't feel the tracks shake
and here come the Red-Eye with seventeen cars.

(repeat chorus)

hey, get off them train tracks!
the engineer hollers
and puckers his pug nose with wind in his eyes,
say, get off them train tracks!
shouts old Chief Bandanna
but Danny's too busy, and Judy just sighs.

(repeat chorus)

well, they keep on hollering
out of them windows
but then when they get there, they just shut their eyes,
the girl hits the windshield,
the boy hits the bottle
and all of the high notes besides,

(repeat chorus)

THE DOIN'S

by Harold Reynolds

Billy walked along kicking at the biggest of the gravels in the road, dreading the proposition of spending this warm spring day in a stuffy old school room. As he crested Pine Hill the river came into view below dancing its way along the rocks toward Radleyville ten miles downstream.

At the top of the hill he paused to let the warm sun and cool breeze simultaneously caress his winter-pale face. The breeze picked up and sent some of the too-long strands of his blonde hair fluttering in his eyes. He snapped his head to one side as was his habitual way of removing the hair from his eyes and began half-skipping down the path that led to where a large cliff protruded several feet out over a calm pool in the river forming a virtual cave on the bank.

This was Billy's hideaway and his fortress. It was where he fought off Indians, Redcoats, Germans or whatever other enemy he created for himself in his boyhood fantasies.

The sun was chasing the shadows down the mountain-side on the other bank of the river but at this early hour the area under the cliff was still deep in shadows. When he reached the edge of the cliff he stopped to look out across the river. The idea of just skipping school and staying right there was growing in the back of his mind.

He picked up a properly rounded rock, located a target on the opposite bank and went through a slightly flawed windup. His aim, however, was not so flawed—the rock hit its target perfectly then glanced off into the brush with a snapping crashing sound.

"Stee-rike three—you're out." He yelled out loud.

The crashing of the rock and his yelling prompted a grunt and a rustling sound from out of the darkness under the cliff behind him. He spun around and squinted to try to find the source of the noise. As his eyes became accus-tomed to the semi-darkness he could make out some form that was not usually there. He couldn't imagine what might be under there unless it was maybe a bear or some kind of big cat.

Just as he decided that it could only be a bear and began to back up very slowly to prevent further disturbing the sleeping animal, it rolled over suddenly with a loud grunt and sat straight up.

Billy's eyes sprung open in surprise and he began back-pedaling as fast as he could, keeping his wide eyes welded on the form. But, before he had backed up very far his boot heel struck a fallen log and sent him sprawling awkwardly straight backwards down the muddy river bank and into the icy water with a resounding splash. He began flailing his arms and thrashing around wildly in fear and disgust.

As he surfaced and shook the water from his ears he heard a deep-throated laugh coming from the bank above him.

"Heh, heh, boy that the funniest dam dive I b'lieve I eva seed—heh, heh. Hear. Grab this heah limb an' I'll pull ya in."

Billy strained to see through the haze of water that blurred his vision. First he made out the limb waving in front of him. Then he traced the limb back and found that it was held by a large Black man with a wide toothy grin and a big black Stetson hat with a red band.

Billy avoided the limb and sloshed onto the bank under his power. He shook all over like a dog does, snapped his hands and began trying to rub the water from his eyes.

"Whut you reckoned I wuz, feller, a haint er a varmit er maybe a big ole bear?" the man in the Stetson asked, then rocked backward with laughter holding his oversized stomach.

Billy's fear gave way to defense. "I never reckoned—much less I never reckoned on findin' nary nigger under that there rock! What're you doin' here? You hain't none of Speel's niggers and they's the only niggers in this county."

"No, I reckon I hain't nobody's nigger 'cept my own. As to whut I wuz doin'—I's havin' myself a real peaceful nap til you come alongst here actin' like Sachel Paige and purt'near skeered tar outta me—that's what."

"Actin' like who?" Billy asked.

"Sachel Paige—that's who," answered the big man.

"Who in tarnation is that?"

"Who is that!? That's prob'ly jest the best damn pitcher in the whole New Nited States. That's who!"

"Then how come I never heered of him—does he pitch in the Big Leagues?" Billy queried.

"You kiddin'—he can't pitch in no big league—he's a nigger. But if'n he could he'd be the best they had. I seed him strike out twenty-seven outta twenty-seven niggers onct at Mobile and if'n they'd been mor'n nine innin's he'da struck out the rest."

Billy sat down on the log that had earlier sent him so ungracefully into the river and took off his boots and dumped the water from them.

"Whut your name, nigger, and whut you doin here 'sides nappin' yerself?" Billy asked as he pulled off his socks, wrung them out and stretched them over a rock to dry.

"Well, Bocefus my first and given name but most folks what calls me anything jest calls me Bo," he said as he pulled a pack of Camels from his jacket, took one out, smoothed it between his big fingers and placed it in his lips. He then offered the pack to Billy who duplicated the big man's every move with the cigarette.

Bo fished into his side pocket and produced a long wooden match which he struck on his shoe sole and lit both smokes. Billy choked on his first ready rolled cigarette as Bo stared out over the river pretending not to notice.

Bo took a long drag on his cigarette, exhaled then continued to answer Billy's question. "As to whut I's doin' here—They's a train comin' down that there track about three this adernoon and I's gonna hop right on her an' head fer Atlanta, Gawja." He waved his cigarette toward where the railroad trestle crossed the river around the bend.

Billy took off his wet shirt, holding the cigarette between his lips and twisting his mouth to one side the way he'd seen his Uncle Woodrow do, and hung it on a limb to dry. Any thoughts he had had of skipping school were needless now. He couldn't possibly go now, but then he couldn't go home either so he would just have to stay there.

As he turned back to where Bo was sitting Indian style, leaned back against the rock, the big man laughed out loud.

"Whut yo mamma would say if she ketched yo wif that there thing twixt yo mouf?" he asked.

"Nothin'," Billy lied. "I'm allowed to smoke if I want to."

"Whut yo name anyways, feller?" Bo asked.

"Bill Sawyers," he answered. (Billy was beginning to sound too much like a little boy for his fourteen years.)

"You much of a baseball player, Bill Sawyers?" Bo asked.

"I hain't too bad I reckon," Billy answered. "This here "Sachmo Whatisname—he's purty good, huh?"

"Jest 'bout the best they is. Tell ya whut I'll show ye a thang er two—I warn't too dern bad my own self in ma day," Bo offered. He took out his pocket knife, found a piece of wood just the right size and weight and patiently carved it into a fairly good semblance of a baseball. He then took his crumpled hat and formed it to function as a mit.

"Here," he said to Billy. "You git up yonder and see if you kin ketched these here pitches."

The wooden ball didn't ever do what Bo wanted it to and often stung Billy's hand through the old hat, but the two had a good time of it.

"See here," Bo would say, "if'n ye takes the ball like this here an' ye puts yer fingers like this here and ye cocks yer arm back like this here an' ye winds up like this here an' ye comes down like this here—why, then that there ball'll do like this here an' hain't nobody 'cept maybe a Ted Williams er somebody like that there that kin even see it much less hit it."

Billy watched attentively and tried everything Bo showed him which was quite a bit. The old man knew his baseball.

The two got so absorbed in baseball instruction and tall tales about Sachel Paige that they lost all track of time. Sometime along in the afternoon they were interrupted by the whistle of a train.

"Dern, dern, dern, I've done went an' missed that there train," Bo said as he stamped one foot in disgust. "Well, I reckon they'll be another one along later—bout seven t'night if I 'member right."

"Yea and I better git home and git my chores 'fore supper too," Billy said.

"OK," Bo said. "Now you 'member you git that there arm back like I showed and you foller through right and you'll be the best pitcher in these parts—ya hear?"

"You bet I will," Billy answered and ran off up the path putting his shirt on as he went. "Bye and thanks."

"Yesuh, yesuh." Bo sat back down and lit up another Camel to wait for the next train.

The next morning was Saturday and another great spring day. As usual, Billy's Uncle Woodrow came by in his old green Ford truck to pick up Billy's father to go to Radleyville to shop.

Billy, as usual, climbed into the back of the truck for the ride. The old truck bounced and rattled its way down the hill and onto the main road for the trip to Radleyville. Billy settled back to watch the scenery pass and think of how he was going to show all the boys at Radleyville School, where there was always a baseball game on Saturdays, his new pitching skills.

After a few minutes' ride the gravel gave way to pavement as the truck swung onto the state highway for the last leg of the journey. The jolting all but stopped and the tires sang out a high-pitched monotone on the hard black asphalt.

Soon the truck began to slow down, swung off the road and stopped at the gas pumps in front of an unpainted shed that had as its most prominent sign, among the bread signs, cola signs, cigarette signs and more, one reading WILSONS GENERAL GOODS STORE AND U.S. POST OFFICE.

The screen door with the bread sign across it swung open and old John Wilson limped out squinting in the bright sunlight. There were men sitting all along the front porch, on cane chairs or Coke cases or whatever else was handy, chewing, spitting, talking and drinking pop. Most of them waved or spoke to Billy's father and uncle. One very old man with a tobacco-stained white beard sat leaned back against the wall in a rickety old cane chair snoring loudly.

Woodrow swung down from the truck and stretched. Old John cranked the handle on the side of the tall round-topped gas pump.

"How much ye need this mornin', Woodrow?" he asked as he twisted off the gas cap and plunged the long steel nozzle into the side of the truck.

"Oh, 'bout a doller's worth I reckon. Shore is purty today ain't it, John," Woodrow answered.

"Yessir hit is. Seems to be gittin' hot early this year."

The meter on the gas pump whirred and a bell rang occasionally until the meter read one dollar. The smell of gasoline drifted up to Billy's nostrils. John withdrew the dripping nozzle and replaced it on the pump, wiped his hands on a rag which dangled from his hip pocket and turned to Woodrow.

"You fellers goin' into town fer the doin's this mornin?"

"What doin's is that?" Woodrow asked.

"Hain't you heered? Evelyn Johnson wuz raped by some big ole nigger yistidy 'bout dinner time. Yes sir, Jake Evits and some of his boys wuz goin home to eat jest about noon and they spied ole Evelyn acomin' up from under that there railroad tressle with her clothes all sideways and her hair all amess. Well, when she seed that bunch she commenced to cryin' an' slangin' snot and claimed that some big nigger had raped her."

"Funny that anybody would have to rape that tramp," Woodrow said.

"Yea, well hit must be, fer Sheriff Blane, he's got some big ole nigger locked up down thar at the Radley County Jailhouse. And they's some fellers whut claims that he won't stay there long fer they're fixin' to have 'em a doin's," John claimed.

"I don't believe I'd care to be no part of no doin's like that," Woodrow said.

"Yea, well you know how them niggers is anyway. They hain't no good none of 'em. They'll steal ye blind if'n ye hain't lookin' real close and rob and rape—hit's a sight what they won't do—an' they's all alike," John said.

"Gotta go, John. See ya later and you take care." Woodrow climbed back into the truck, cranked it up and rolled it onto the highway for the remainder of the trip.

Billy for the first time in his life doubted what one of his elders said for he knew that Bo wouldn't steal nothin' or rape anybody. So all niggers couldn't be like that one that the sheriff had in jail—Bo sure wasn't.

The truck soon rounded a long curve and passed a weathered sign that read "WELCOME TO RADLEYVILLE —HOME OF HOSPITALITY—POPULATION 1,346—ELEVATION 2,450."

As they started down the hill that Billy knew from his many past journeys here led to the Radleyville-Big Squaw River Bridge the truck began to slow down. Billy wondered why; this was not part of the usual trip; usually Woodrow let it flat out down this hill.

He stood up and tiptoed to see what the delay was. On the bridge stood a couple dozen men in a crowd at the center of the bridge. The dusty black Radley County Sheriff Cruiser was rolling slowly onto the other side of the bridge.

Ole Buzz, the deputy, must have been driving because on the right running board was Big Sheriff Blane, hatless for the first time that Billy could remember. Blood was dried on a large mouse under his left eye, his shirt was bloody and torn. Cradled in his right arm was a sawed-off, double-barrelled shotgun, his left arm was hooked around the window post for support.

Billy scanned from the crowd to the side of the bridge where he saw a big hemp rope, tied to one of the beams, that stretched out of sight down over the edge of the bridge. It was pulled very tight and swayed slightly.

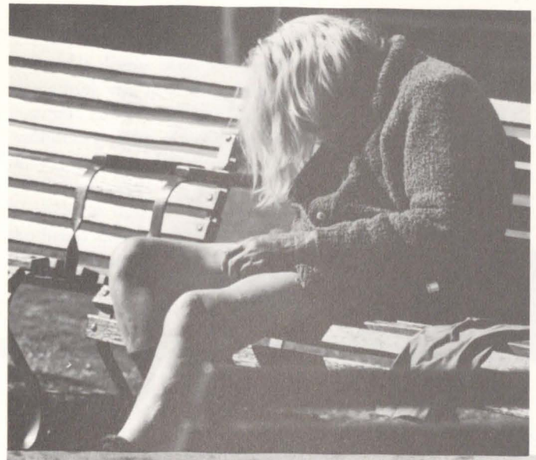
Then suddenly something caught his eye—there—in the middle of the road—trampled flat by dozens of hobnailed boots was a sight that made Billy's heart stop momentarily, then begin to pound wildly, his breath came in gasps, and his stomach filled his mouth with the bitter taste of half-digested breakfast.

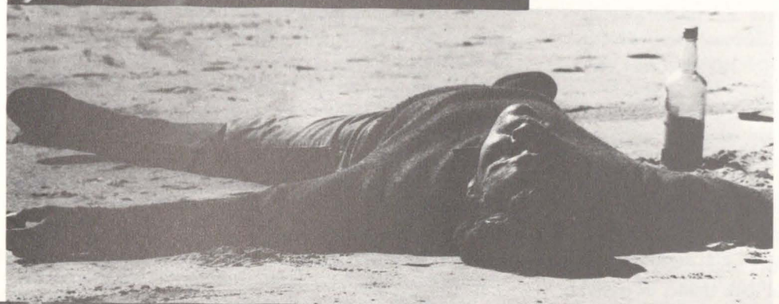
Trampled flat though it was it was still unmistakably—a black Stetson hat with a red band.

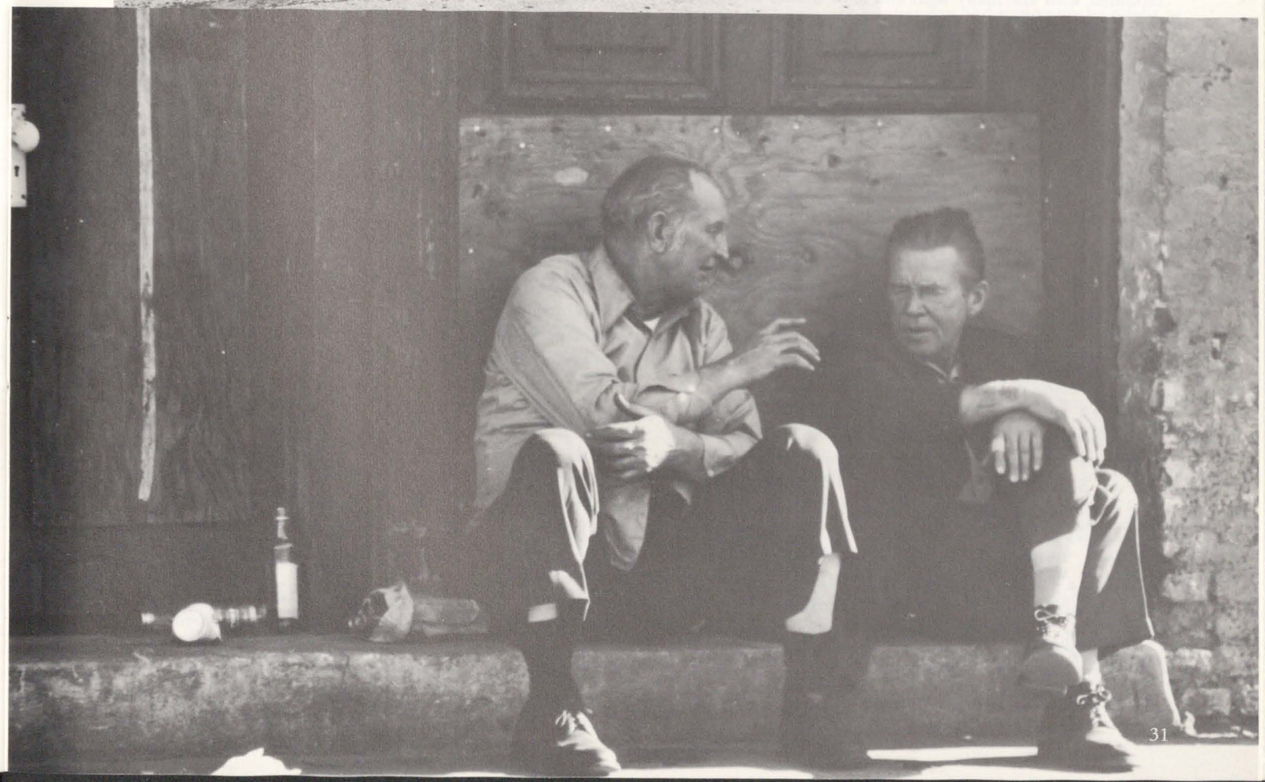
No Jumping No Running No Bicycling No Ball-playing
No Spitting No War-Criminals No . . .

Hitler is still alive and I know it.
I know it cause I saw him the other day
Drinkin' a beer in the park.
Someone should have come to arrest him.
You aren't allowed to drink alcoholic
Beverages in a public park.
That's against the law.

by s.s.ehrlich







A BAPTISM

PAUL HEDEEN

Sun glinted off their weapons and the countryside bloomed with the many light and dark shades of green. It was spring and flowers, white and purple, colored the sides of the road. Their boots made prints in the soft, rain-soaked ground which had already been cut by a thousand wagons. They had left their winter camps with the replacements that had arrived just that morning. A light blue sky and a bright sun silently watched them while a myriad of colored birds gently danced overhead. Company C of the Fifth Alabama plodded along through the warm spring air of southern Tennessee. The strict parade lines had long since broken down. Now they were just one hundred and fifty boys not looking very military; but then, twenty-year-old boys aren't supposed to be military. The new replacements like Tommy Joe didn't quite know how to carry themselves, and were self-conscious and awkward in their new uniforms and equipment.

"What made you join anyway, Tommy Joe?"

"Felt I should," Tommy answered. Sam shook his head.

"A patriot, huh?" He looked up at the sky and put his hand over his heart in mock heroism. "Stars and bars forever. Sheeit . . . Hell, I joined to get away from home. Got Lizzy Billings in trouble, I did. So I left home. There just happened to be a war goin' on." He laughed and shook his head. "Probably should've stayed home and married her, been a lot safer." He paused. "Well, maybe not." They both laughed and continued walking, constantly readjusting the gear on their backs and bitching and back-biting like all good soldiers.

"Remember when we thought Lizzy was so good we fought over her, Tommy?"

"Yea, sure do, Sam." Tommy began laughing at the recollection.

"We was both drunk, we was and, . . . and we wanted her so bad we could taste it." By now Tommy was laughing so hard the tobacco juice ran down his chin and he stopped and stooped so it wouldn't hit his uniform, wiped his chin and shook it free from his finger. "Yea, but ol' Lizzy don't even seem real no more. Been through a lot. Everythin' back home don't seem real no more." Sammy readjusted his pack and wiped a sleeve across his forehead. He looked seriously at Tommy. "You say my Ma and Pa are doin' okay, huh? Pa won't have no help this spring with the plantin'. I remember how I used to hate it, all that plowin'. Hope Pa don't get any foolish notions 'bout joinin' up. Ma needs him. D'is ain't gonna be no quick fight like everybody thought. It's lasted a year and it's gonna last a lot longer." Tommy walked at his side, a little more tired than Sam. He wasn't used to the heavy equipment and all the walking. He looked at the sky and spoke.

"Remember fishin', Sam, down by 'Possum Creek; after the plantin' was done, me and you every afternoon. Dreamin' . . . we used to dream 'bout goin' to the city, Atlanta maybe; all d'em pretty girls and finding us a couple; we would . . ." Sam cut him short.

"Yea know, d'ose were just dreams, Tommy Joe. I don't think 'bout that much anymore. Don't think 'bout Lizzy, don't think 'bout fishin'. Things is changed, you'll see." His friend had changed a lot in one short year. His face was harder. The blonde down on his face had become dark and coarse. His curly blonde hair was longer and his eyes seemed a deeper blue. He had quickly become a man. But something else had changed in Sam. They were the same age, but one year of war had given Sam an insight, a quiet withdrawal. The girl-chasing, whiskey-drinking, happy-go-lucky, big smile friend was gone. He seemed wiser beyond his years, wiser to a point of understanding. Tommy thought as they walked. He thought about the changes, it bothered him but being lost in thought made the time go faster and seemed to make the miles a little shorter. They walked all that afternoon and that night the company camped in an apple orchard near a small railroad junction named Shiloh. Every so often firing was heard in the distance and whispers around the campfires spoke of an impending battle and the summer ahead.

"What's it like, Sam? You know, the fightin'." Tommy had finally mustered the courage.

Sam looked at his hands and then the ground.

"It's like nothin' you've ever seen. It's strange . . . and it's frightenin'. It scares ya but ya get used to it and then ya find ya never get used to it. It passes like . . . , like a blur and ya become sumpthin' ya never been before." He looked at Tommy. "Like a cornered groundhog, just like we got 'em in the barn. Ya hiss, bite, claw and growl. You tear at each other but not with teeth and claws but guns." He paused and thought for a moment. "And when its over ya can't believe it happened. It's like ya went out of yourself; ya know? Ya became sumpthin' and ya don't know how. I can't really describe it but you'll see." Then he added, "Maybe t'morrow." Sam turned his stare to the ground. A light breeze stirred the branches and the fire flickered in the moving air. The stars shone bright overhead promising another clear day and the two friends were silent, Sam gazing into the fire and Tommy looking into the sky and thinking about what his friend had said. Tommy, feeling he's asked enough, decided he'd better lighten the mood.

"And you got Lizzy Billin's fat, huh Sam?" He gave Sam a playful jab.

"Yup, sho did." A look of pride swept across his face. "She was a helluva woman, that Lizzy. And we fought over her. Ya'll started it too, ya damn fool. I had to bloody yo' nose."

"Well it was ya'll that started it, Sam, not me."

"Don't hand me that horse shit, Tommy Joe. It was ya'll and ya know it." Sam jabbed him back and before they knew it they were wrestling around the fire throwing mock punches and playfully stabbing at each other with imaginary bayonets.

"Don't ya lie to me, Sam. Or I'll whup ya'll so bad I'll have ya kissin' yo sister!"

Finally they both got sufficiently tired, and lay and looked at the stars.

"What happened to her anyway?" Sam's phrases were broken as he tried to catch his breath.

"She done blamed it on Ervin Baxter," Tommy answered. "They's married now with one kid an' one on the way. He's got a job workin' fo' the gov'ment in Atlanta."

"It'll keep 'em from gettin' his hands dirty," Sam added.

"That's not wedlock, Sam. That's deadlock friend, and she's gonna ride him till his balls fall off."

"I hope someone's there to catch 'em," Sam said as he raised himself from the ifre. "Time for some sleep, I'm tired. Get yo'self some rest, Tommy Joe; tomorrow may be a big day."

"Gonna try, Sam. Goodnight."

"Gawd bless ya, Tommy Joe."

He watched Sam spread out his bedroll. He rolled his boots in an extra blanket for a pillow, crawled between the two blankets on the ground and was soon asleep. He noticed that two of the blankets were army issue and the other was a thick, heavy quilt. He thought about Sam's mother. She made a lot of those quilts, patchwork and homespun. Sam was a lot like her, they shared a lot of warmth. Tommy fashioned his bed the same way Sam did but was too restless to sleep so he tended the fire. He thought about his past: his Ma and Pa, the farm, Lizzy, fishin', huntin' and all the rest of the fleeting pictures that only two days ago were reality. He wondered what brought him here, what brought everyone here. It was all so removed when he was back home. But all the time he knew his friend Sam was fighting. He traced it back in his mind. The cry went up for replacements and he decided to join. He pulled some strings to get with Sam and had been with him one whole day. He and twenty-five other replacements had arrived in Kentucky by train to meet Sam's company that morning. He thought, "I'm a replacement, a replacement for a dead man. I hope I don't need a replacement someday." This was his first day and tomorrow he might be fighting. The thought of it scared him, shot up his spine and jumped out his hands. "What will it be like and how will I do?" The thought of it troubled him. A call came for the changing of the guard. Then all was silent again. His friend slept peacefully and this eased the tension that ran through his body. He thought, "Maybe I can be removed from it all like Sam." It was a lie and he knew it; Sam wasn't removed from it at all, he felt every bit of it, but it was a good enough lie in that it allowed him to sleep.

The morning was a bright one. The smell of the apple orchards hung in the air and birds sang and flitted from one branch to another overhead. It would be sunny, approaching hot, and it would be hot all summer. The men were aroused early from sleep and sat grouped around fires and waited for coffee to brew, joked, and smoked pipes. In the east they heard distant firing. It was common, and would be all summer. No one stirred; it was removed and couldn't hurt them.

"Gimme a chaw, Sam. How's that coffee comin'?" Sam handed him his tobacco pouch and smiled.

"It's comin', Tommy Joe; slow, but it's comin'. Helluva lot a fightin' to the east, huh?"

"Yea, helluva lot." Then laughing, "Just as long as it stays to the east." Sam smiled in approval and sat hunched by the fire. "D'ese apple trees are sure perty, ain't they?" Tommy lay back down on his back and stretched in the warm sun. "Ya know? We should a never fought over tha'

girl." He looked at Sam. "Ain't nothin' worth friends fightin' over." Sam looked up from his cooking, smiled and said,

"Ain't nothin' . . . no nothin' worth fightin' over, 'specially a woman."

He looked back at the fire and said in an undertone, "Anyway it was ya'll that started it." Tommy Joe sprang up.

"Now Gawd damn it, Samuel James McCalester. We went thro' this all las' night. Ya'll know that ain't the truth." Sam just smiled and went on cooking and Tommy, irritated by his silence, crawled over and gave him a playful punch in the shoulder. Sam jumped.

"Now ya'll stop that! Ya'll have me burnin' myself soon." They both laughed and Tommy lay back down and closed his eyes in the sun.

"Man, I'll tell pa. These here apple blossoms sure are . . . ." He was interrupted by the sergeant.

"Git yo'self some cover boys. Yanks comin' and lookin' for a fight!" Tommy, eyes wide with fear, looked at Sam. In one sweeping movement Sam kicked out the fire, scooped up his mess tin, rifle and pack and fell into a hollow. Tommy gathered up his things and was in the hollow a half-second behind him. Then up from the creek-bed ran a private from another group. He was down there tending to his business when he heard the commotion. He was running and trying to pull on his pants, all at the same time, until he got entangled and fell flat on his face. A hundred and fifty hands tried desperately to muffle one hundred and fifty guffawing boys. Just as he fell behind a tree, his pants still halfway to his knees, a shot nipped a branch above his head.

"They's comin'," Tommy said; his voice shook.

"Yup." Sam paused, then: "Hope there ain't too many. It's too pretty a day to fight."

"There ain't no good day to fight, right?" Tommy looked at Sam for approval and then added, "Ya said so yo'self." They were all pulling out extra bullets and powder cartridges and laying them by their sides, cocking their weapons and peering out over the barrels.

"They gonna be like sittin' ducks."

"So is we," Tommy said, half to himself. His gun was shaking. "We ain't got no real cover. Like you, I hope there ain't too many." Sweat ran down their foreheads in the morning sun, hands tightened around gun stocks, the birds fluttered away and all was silent.

They waited, and there they saw them, rank after rank of men in blue crashing through the underbrush. Fire shot from a hundred and fifty barrels. Then the chaos of ramrods clinking against the barrels and then another volley. With each volley men in blue crumpled to the ground. Wounded men shrieked, holding bleeding wounds. Men staggered, their hands covering wounds and looking for some cover only to be shot twice and three times. A man caught a bullet across his stomach and men on both sides watched in horror as the terrified soldier juggled his entrails in his hands trying to stuff them back inside only to be struck again in the chest and crumple to the ground. In contrast with the drama of the dying, the men doing the shooting were very mechanical; they just loaded and fired.

Sam fought with incredible smoothness. He stayed down, loaded swiftly and peered out just long enough to shoot and like most of them he didn't aim too carefully, he just fired in the general direction. Bullets whistled, men shouted and screamed and the wounded moaned. It all meshed into a high shrill noise that numbed their minds until they were insensitive. But Sam did notice he wasn't hearing the sound of Tommy's rifle, so he looked over. Tommy was there, one hand gripped around the rifle, the knuckles were white; the other hand clawed the ground beneath his face, while tears ran down his cheeks and he sobbed softly.

"Tommy!" Sam shouted almost in his ear. Tommy started to get up. "Git down you fool. Ya run and they'll just shoot ya in the back!"

"I can't Sam. I can't do it. I can't stand it." He sobbed and held his face close to the ground and covered it with his hands. Sam grabbed him by the front of the shirt and shook him while shouting in his ear, slowly and carefully.

"Ya grab that gun, Tommy. Then ya shoot it; then ya load it and then ya shoot it again. And ya'll keep shootin' or else they'll be shootin' you. Now git to it or they'll be killin' all of us!"

Tommy picked up his gun, pointed it toward the woods, closed his eyes and pulled the trigger. A bullet hit close and threw dirt all over them but Tommy kept shooting, slowly at first, but then faster.

The dead fell on the dead for both sides as the battle raged back and forth the entire morning. Bullets whined through the orchard and bursting blossoms fluttered to the ground in a beautiful white array. After a while they just fired wildly. The smoke and the apple blossoms made it impossible to see; they just stayed low, loading and firing. The rifle fire became incredibly intense. It tore the bark and clipped the branches from the trees.

The order to advance was given. Tommy looked at Sam in disbelief as Sam followed the command and sprang to his feet. He hadn't gone five steps when he was hit in the chest. His back bent and his right leg shot up in the air at the impact. He probably saw the white blossoms and the blue sky as he fell backwards to the ground. Tommy, eyes white with terror, dragged him by the collar back to the tree. Blood was pulsating from the wound and soldiers thundered by dodging the corpses and sending up little puffs of fallen blossoms.

"It ain't bad, is it Tommy?" His voice was shaking and he was having trouble breathing.

"No, it ain't bad. Just shush up!" Tommy's hands were shaking and he couldn't hold the tears streaming from his eyes.

"I'm gonna die, ain't I Tommy?" He looked Tommy in the eyes as Tommy feverishly stuffed pieces of shirt in the hole in his chest.

"No, Sam." He tried to smile. "War's over for you now. You can go home. Go home, Sam, ya know what that means? No more of this hell. Ya can go home to yo' farm. Why maybe ol' Ervin will even give ya Lizzy back." Sam tried to smile; he coughed and blood trickled from the corner of his mouth.

The battle moved from the orchard and Tommy watched in horror as his friend died. It didn't take long, maybe a couple of minutes. He paled, his chest rattled and then, in what seemed one last desperate effort, his body arched, then fell. His head was tilted back and a stream of blood slowly trickled from his mouth, down his face, and into his curly blonde hair. A bullet whined overhead and the air was filled with a cloud of white blossoms that fell and stuck in the blood on the dead man's face. More soldiers thundered by and the sun shone bright. Someone was shouting for help but it seemed far away. All the noise seemed far away.

Tommy was alone. He knelt by the body and cried. He cried in long sobs and his hands shook while the white apple blossoms fell softly, annointing his head and shoulders.

J.R. ALLEY

You Got Me I Got You I Got Me You Got You and We Still Have Nothing

You will throw your shoes up
in the air as I pass
in the street;
And I shall reap souls
like wheat.
You will feed my hunger
like a pain
You will eat out your own
stomach, forfeit your
brain
while I dance on a
man's hat–
believe me,
you'll like that.
My skeleton can give birth
to nothing more,
not poems not dreams,
I will lie down in your
bed and scream.
You will hear my
silence on the walls
the way a lemming calls.
You will love me because I have it
up here, hidden soft and
warm
unharmed, unarmed
but cold, and
it waits.
You know you want it.

Veteran (or a Love Poem)

Walt Whitman is singing in the closet:
but more likely laughing
as we fail in bed.
I am impatient with you
War Wounds.

Yet
I wait.
The sheets stick like fly paper.
There are no magazines on the
sidetable.
Gideon's bible is illustrated.

I recite the Ginsberg "Whitman"
poem to myself imagining WW
pushing his grocery cart down the
aisle, squeezing canteloupes and
complaining to the bag boy about
the price of meat . . .

Chewing your finger, staring at the
infinitely boring, faded pattern of the
rug on the rented room floor, I touch
you. I explore the rainbow of tattoos
and try to pronounce those unpronounceable
Asian lady names down the back of your thigh.

I whisper softly onto the silence:
"Walt Whitman would be outraged at the
price of canned tomato juice."

The Jelly Son

Small in big arms
you bring him to me;
I nurse him as I have
nursed you but his
four week old pink jelly
mouth is more aggressive,
more sure, more hungry.
He is much like you but did
you really expect our son
to be mistletoe and a pair
of permanent press socks?

You furrowed the ground and
seeded it–I only held him.
I am the earth.
He can't be a New York Yankee fan yet
and I can't recover in a day.

Don't sit on the edge of the bed
like a bird with a frozen wing.
Wait and kiss the baby's head good night.
You're next.

The Fire

Blackened bones
asleep in the night–
meatless faces
seem to grin so
wide-eyed and stupidly,
with such a blankness.

I couldn't believe those were the
bones of an incurable insomniac, you
who roamed the house complaining your
heart was pounding in back of your
eyes or the shoes were restless in
the closet or the room was just too
tight in the dark–you had always been
afraid of the dark but more . . . the silence.

Who was that man who put you to sleep
at last? Did he have the habit of fingering
the light covers and setting fire to the
bathroom rug? Did he put the dark in his
pocket, did he wear his shoes to bed?

The Demise of M. Poe

Barbara Heinen

OR

HOW TO OUT—EDGAR EDGAR

I do believe that of all mortals to tread the dust of this finite planet, there are few who have been known to possess a calmer mien, a more sane composure in times of stress, a greater ability to rise above the unpleasantries, however extreme they may be, which become associated with the inevitable obstacles that tend to strew themselves before the weary traveller along life's path, than I. I say this with all due modesty and yet with extraordinary certitude, and although such be the case, the events of these past few weeks seem to be compiling themselves with such great abundance and abomination that even I, sanest of individuals though I may be, sometimes feel my mental condition teetering on the perilous precipice of rationality which rims the molten volcano of dementia.

As the hours stretch into days, and the days into weeks, the confines of this dank, roach-infested fruit cellar continue to peck with increasing incessancy upon the fibers of my nerves and upon the very cellular structure which composes the hemispheres of my brain.

"To move! To move!" cries my cramped and pain-wracked physical being.

"Keep me busy! Keep me busy!" cries my tortured mental member.

And indeed, the sole reasonable means of retaining even a marginal soundness of body and mind seems to be the constant exercise of both facilities. As I am forced to sit upon the cold moss-covered stones which comprise the floor of these lower chambers, hunched over with my head upon my knees because of the lowness of the shelves of pickled peaches and quince marmalade, my movements are necessarily extremely limited. I have, however, devised a series of physical exercises which I perform every hour according to the silver watch on my grandfather's fob. These activities consist mainly of finger and toe extensions and retractions, muscular contractions and expansions, shoulder rollings, and various facial contortions. Having completed my hourly regimen of bodily activities, I regularly embark on a program of mental self-quizzes, puzzles, and poetic recollections. Having "existed" (and most assuredly, it has been merely existing) in this hellish hole for seventeen and two-thirds days, and having slightly fewer than eleven days remaining (according to my eavesdropping ears), I have come upon the brilliance of an idea which even I, in my most humble of intellects, foresee as transcending the limits of time, death, ordinary human literature, and even the accomplishments of my own creatively prolific past. I have decided to write the story of my own death.

The facts of my confinement and impending death are so inconceivably bizarre, so incredulously deranged, that my retelling of them may arouse widespread disbelief, may even cause many to say that I am mad. I am, however, when I take in hand my pen and pad of paper which I had concealed within an inner vest pocket, of sound mind and body, no matter how close to the brink of lunacy I may tread during the moments of my most horrible of nightmares. The events I am about to relate are true, their inevitable outcome still wandering at this moment in the miasma of the yet-to-come.

It was December 24, three weeks ago to this day, that I returned to this large grey stone dwelling, resplendent with porches and porticos, towers and turrets, ivies and mosses, memories and mysteries. I had come to spend the Christmas holiday with my two favorite people, dear old Aunt Esmirelda, and sweet little Aunt Phoebe. Some of my most cherished reminiscences from childhood are those which concern hours spent in this lovely old monstrosity of a house, with my two eccentric aunts: stories by the fire, searches for hidden messages and treasures in countless secret closets and crannies, the melodies that Aunt Phoebe used to play on the harpsichord which stood in the corner of the third parlor, and most of all, great abundances of exquisite culinary delights. Aunt Esmirelda, plump and heavy-breasted, always clad in black silk dresses with stiff white collars, spent most of her time in the kitchen, preparing the most delightful and exotic of puddings, pies and roasts. Her specialty was venison pie, which she would bake in the hugest of pans and serve only on the rarest of occasions. How I would love to have that distinctive odor of roasting venison pie greet my youthful nostrils at the end of a long wintry hike to Aunt Phoebe's and Aunt Esmirelda's! This special treat had been my surprise feast on only five or six occasions during my youth.

This Christmas our dinner was delicious beyond description: roasted geese, candied yams, corn souffle, and an endless array of hearty courses and extravagant accompaniments. The meal lacked only two things: venison pie, for apparently Mr. Worthingham had not been able to exterminate the appropriate deer, and fine wines, for my dear little old aunties held fast to their beliefs that spirits of alcohol were the potions of the devil. And never, never, would these two kindly ladies tend to stray anywhere near the paths of sin, whether it be in word or deed, or even in thought.

Immediately after our Christmas feast, we retired to the third parlor, the one which was hung with the heaviest of purple draperies and decorated with cut glass ornaments form all over the world, and listened for two hours or more to the ethereal, almost unreal, tones which Aunt Phoebe could evoke from the fragile harpsichord.

We all spent much time during those first few days sitting by the fireside recalling old friends and old times. I always puffed on my pipe, which gave me a great deal of inner contentment, and this caused Aunt Phoebe a great amount of perplexity, but she nevertheless always acceded to my one wicked wish to smoke the leaves of sin.

It was late in the afternoon of the third day after Christmas when Aunt Esmirelda called to me to request that I accompany her to the cellar to select my favorite fruit preserves to have with the lamb roast which she was preparing for that evening's repast. She carried the candle and led the way down the long and winding stone stairway which led to the old fruit closets which had been a favored hiding place of my earlier and apparently no more foolhardy days. My heretofore beloved aunt asked that I step inside the smallest of the fruit closets and choose the jar of preserves or marmalade which happened to strike my fancy for that evening. My eye at once hit upon a rather large glass jar of the palest and most delicately green gooseberry preserves. As I reached for the delicacy (and oh, how it pains me to relive that moment of utter horror and sickening disillusionment), dear (and to think of how truly DEAR I had always considered her to be!) old Aunt Esmirelda suddenly applied the flame of her beeswax lighter of the darkness to the back of my hand. As I turned toward her and doubled over in pain, she seemed to muster a strength which I had heretofore associated only with athletes of the king's court, and shoved, yea, literally *stuffed* me beneath the bottom shelf of fruits and jams, slammed the huge oaken door of the closet, clinked a heavy-sounding lock on its outside, and laughed a more hideous laugh than I had ever imagined could have come even from the caverns of the demons.

Mistake. Surely. She must have made a mistake. Temporary insanity? Yes, that must be it. She would realize shortly what she had done and come to retrieve me. Older people do have these little lapses of rationality. I am, and always have been, her favorite grand-nephew. Joke! That was it! I should have known it was a joke from the first. Aunt Esmirelda had never been noted for her sense of humor, in fact had never been seen to display a full-blown smile, but surely she had been saving all of her humor for all of these years for this one fantastic, spectacular, original, joke.

"HA HA, Aunt Esmirelda," I called, trying not to show the tinge of desperation which I knew must be somewhere within my unsteady voice. "This is the funniest joke anyone has ever perpetrated upon me. The humor of it all is literally 'doubling me over' in mirth!"

Silence.

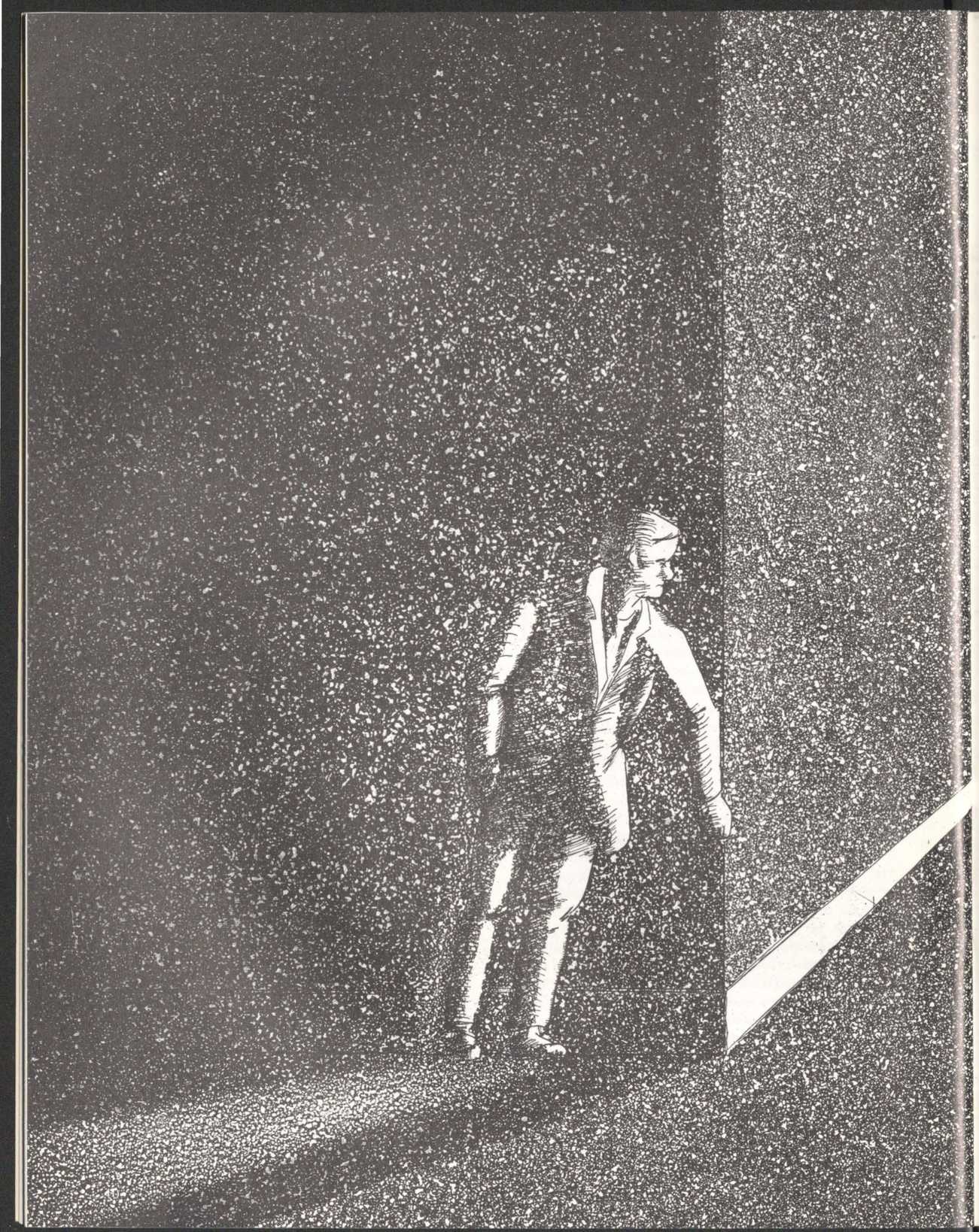
Dead, utter, distinct, empty silence.

"Aunt Esmirelda!" I called again and again throughout that first and most frightening night. "Aunt Phoebe—the joke is over, the fun is past, the laughter is gone. Someone! Anyone! Please let me loose! Free me! Free! I just want to be free!"

As a child, I had always had a particular horror of being enclosed in small tight places; it made my brain feel as if it would explode and spill its contents over the nearness of the walls. Claustrophobia, Mother had said. Claustrophobia, Father had said. Claustrophobia, Aunt Esmirelda had said. Yes, now I distinctly remember—Aunt Esmirelda had actually said it on more than one occasion: "That boy has claustrophobia." Oh, my God, my God, the horror, the sheer terror, the tightness of the space, the closeness of the walls. I could not breathe, my breaths were getting closer together and more shallow. I knew they were. My arteries were pulsing harder, protruding repulsively from my arms and neck. My ears, my ears pounded, pounded, incessantly, obsessively. Mad, mad! Surely I would go mad! Surely my brain would erupt in a violent explosion!

The next thing I knew, I was awakening from something, I knew not what: slumber, hardly; death, I thought not; unconsciousness of a deep faint, probably. From the time on my watch, which I could barely perceive in the deep greyness of this cellar, I reasoned it to be at least the next morning. Approximately nine-thirty. My body ached in every sinew and muscle. I was cramped beneath a heavy shelf, unable to move more than an inch in any direction. Shiny-looking cockroaches crawled over my hands, my torso, my legs, my face. They particularly seemed to relish the festering burn upon the back of my hand. A gnawing sound which I heard from somewhere up above I guessed to be the unfriendly teeth of a rat trying to force his way into my dungeon for a feast.

I tried at least a dozen more times to call to the mercy of my two aunties, who surely still loved me yet. Upon concluding that they neither heard nor intended to hear, I set about making some decisions concerning the future



course of my life, however brief or lengthy it would prove to be.

First of all, I would not go mad. I would most definitely not go mad. There were those who had been known to say that I was mad, and I would prove them liars to the moment of my death. I would NOT go mad. That was my first and most important decision of my imprisonment.

Secondly, I would keep my physical and mental health intact by regularly using all of my personal facilities as much as the limitations of space and darkness would permit me to do. Hence, I devised the program of exercises for both my mind and body which I recounted to you earlier in this narrative. Throughout the seventeen days of my confinement, I have adhered religiously to my self-prescribed ordeals, movements and calculations.

My food, I recount with feelings of fondness, puzzlement, delight, and disgust, was the same savory food which Aunt Esmirelda had served to me over the more than forty years during which I had been a frequent visitor at her mansion. Turkey, roasted beef, plum cake—all cut in slices thin enough to pass under the heavy oaken door, were slid to me many times throughout each day. Their exquisite aromas, my nagging boredom, an overpowering hunger, and that ever-present desire to live were the forces which enabled me to contort my body into a position in which I could slide the morsels of food with my toes into a position from which I could reach them with my hands, slide them very carefully up my legs to my knees, and into my mouth. Very often I would drop a piece of meat time and time again before it would finally make its way to my waiting mouth. Very often, also, my bite of cake would crunch with its preponderance of swarming cockroaches. I learned during my first day of imprisonment that if I desired to eat any nourishment at all, I would have no choice other than to take it á la cockroach. One could almost imagine after a while that cockroaches had a bit of a distinctive flavor, not completely unlike that of Polynesian coconut.

During the early hours of the evenings, which I had designated as my "recreation period," my mind raced rampantly on through the devisement of two remarkably clever inventions, and the preliminary outlines of three new tales: one of the detective genre, two of the grandest variety of horror. All of these exceptional creations, when unleashed upon a culturally and intellectually starved populace upon my release (or hoped-for release) would most certainly reap for me a truly great preponderance of wealth and fame. Now I had indeed something for which to extend my life.

And then, early yesterday, I was forced to face the full realization of the certainty of my doom. And the certainty of my doom is in no measure comparable, in its ability to strike panic in my heart, to the unutterable ghoulishness of the details of the fashion in which I am to die and the purpose of my impending death.

Until the time at which yesterday morning's first tasty tidbits of ambrosia were slipped beneath my lofty companion, the oaken door, neither Aunt Esmirelda nor Aunt Phoebe had uttered to me a word or an answer to my innumerable questions and outcries; they extended not even the courtesy of a hiss or a chortle or a cough. Even a sound of their footsteps as they descended the stairs to my dungeon was entirely absent, and I had no way of discerning which of the two dears was bringing me my food. The totality of the silence was trying very hard to drive me mad. But the totality of the silence would not drive me mad. It would not drive me mad. It would not.

And then with the early morning ambrosia came the first words. The first sickening ghastly vile demented revolting inhuman repulsive words. Their very loathsomeness caused me to spew forth great volumes of vomit, which spread themselves over the raunchiness of my clothing and the unbearable putrescence of a cell floor which had been already covered with a two-and-a-half week accumulation of my own urine and feces.

"Well, my dear sister," had said little Phoebe's little voice, "do you think he shall be quite plump enough in just eleven more days?"

"He'll have to be," replied the buxom biddy. "He must hang to cure for at least thirty days, and Reverend Rutherford will be here for his birthday on February 29th. We wouldn't want to disappoint Reverend Rutherford. You know how much he loves my "venison pie!"

"Don't you think we had better start on the toes very soon?" questioned Aunt Phoebe.

"Yes," answered Aunt Esmirelda. "We've only ten more days after today. Let's take them one a day this time. Don't you think that would be quite jolly indeed?"

"Oh yes, yes! Do! Do! You are so clever, dear sister. We shall drop them into the pickling juice, one each day. And *think* of the superior flavor they will have developed by February 29th, given that little extra time. The ones in the bottom of the jar will be the tastiest of all!" And then Aunt Phoebe gave forth the most piercing laugh, if indeed you could call such an inhuman sound a laugh, that my ears had ever heard. In fact, it was the first laugh I had ever heard come from Aunt Phoebe in my life.

With the descent of these grisly revelations upon my being, and the waning of the first consequent shock which they precipitated, I became overwhelmingly lethargic. I lost all desire to eat, all interest in my physical exercises, and any enthusiasm which I had once entertained to contrive inventions and create tales. I sat in a dull stupor, practically floating in the detestable abominations of human wastes of various varieties which adorned my cage.

With the dawn of today, however, it came upon my mind that I would make one last contribution to mankind from my pen. I would write the almost untellable tale of the tortures and torments of my last days, and of the wretchedness of my soul as I approach the final moments before my death. How ironic, how hideously macabre, that I, I who have striven to contribute to literature the most ingenious tales of murder detection, the most sinister stories of horror and vengeance, should be doomed to write as my final work of art, a story in which I truly am the victim, the story of my own final agonies! At that thought, I let out a loud animal cry which echoed and reechoed

throughout the tombs and tunnels of that dank, dark, deep and dreary chasm of a cellar. The cry was one of anguish, but not of madness. No, not of madness. Not not not not not NOT of madness!

And so, this day has come to be spent in recreating the events which have brought me so close to my demise, and inconceivable as it may seem to others who may later read this, it has brought me a peculiar sense of delight and accomplishment to recount these incredible facts.

And now it is one week later, three more days to live. My food consists entirely of starches and sweets now. I do gather from this and from the conversation outside my door that my dear carnivorous aunts would like me to be soft and plump and sweet to the taste. Apparently the good Reverend Rutherford likes his "venison pie" sweet and succulent. I am so glad that I will be pleasing the good man of the cloth.

As anyone who can count the days of the week should know, I have but three toes remaining, all on my right foot. Every day at precisely eleven o'clock in the ante meridian, the long skinny and shiny saw is stuck through the hole in the door which was made for this purpose expressly, and goes to work at amputating the next pedatic digit. Try as I may, through seemingly impossible maneuvers and contortions, my extremely cramped position disenables me from escaping the slice of the saw. Then long tongs are extended through the hole in the door, and they proceed to retrieve the highly prized toe, nail and all. For awhile each day, following my digital amputation, frighteningly large quantities of my own blood spill themselves upon the carpet of urine, excrement, vomit, and blood from other days.

How could one man have survived such torment for three-and-a-half weeks? And still maintain a respectable degree of sanity? A mind and body well-trained by a lifetime of strict self-discipline, I may say. Some outside force beyond human comprehension, you may add.

And now, according to my calculations and my utter dearth of toes upon either of my feet, I assume it to be the day of my death. How they will accomplish my murder, I do not know. At what time I will pass into eternity, I am not cognizant. Where I will go and what I will do after my death, I do know. And those grisly details have been so indelibly etched into my brain that I shall never forget them, as long as I live! Those two vile excuses for human beings have stood just beyond my door daily of late, planning, drooling, I suppose, and cackling over the coming events.

Immediately after my death, my head will be chopped from my body, treated, and hung separately to dry. It will, in time, be donated to the Salem Town Hall, to be hung on display in companion with the seven other shrunken heads which I and others had truly believed to be worthy donations to the public, artifacts of primitive cultures, souvenirs from the world-wide travels of the distinguished elderly citizens of the town, Esmirelda and Phoebe Tarkington.

My stomach, for what reason I do not fully understand, will be buried in the flower garden to the rear of the house. Apparently it will serve as an excellent fertilizer. Esmirelda and Phoebe have always been noted for their unusually large and exquisite asters. I used to love to take home a bouquet of them to Mother.

The rest of my body will be hung, upside-down, in one of the numerous closets which line this cellar. For one month, I will cure. Large pans on the floor will catch my blood as it drips from my carcass. This blood, so I hear my darlings exclaim, will make a finer beet soup than was ever set before any reigning monarch. First course at the birthday party.

Pickled toes, the second course.

"Venison pie" the main course, most certainly. As a child I once received a terrible thrashing for climbing up on Aunt Esmirelda's heavy mahogany dining table. Now I will occupy the place of honor upon it.

Four fours are sixteen, sixteen sixteens are two-forty-six, no, two-fifty-six, two-hundred-fifty-six, two hundred fifty-sixes are sixty-five thousand, five hundred thirty-six, sixty-five thousand . . . . . .

Then, with a melody
Stronger and statelier,
Led me at length
To the city and palace
Of Arthur the King;
Touch'd . . . . . ."

And when I hear them coming, I will jam these papers—see, there are not many, I have written as small as one can, covered every corner of each paper—I will jam these papers into my mouth, and fight death with locked jaws, locked as tight as possible, so that the rigors mortis will keep them there and hide my secret story from my murderers. Perhaps, at some time in history, someone will examine the shrunken heads in the Town Hall. And then the world can learn these facts which I wish to donate to mankind.

Oh, God have mercy . . . . . .I do believe those pastries which aunties last gave to me must have contained the potion of my death. Alas, my stomach writhes and heaves, vomit issues forth, my bowels empty themselves, my eyes are twitching, my nerves are convulsing, it becomes increasingly difficult to pen these happenings as they occur . . . . . .

God, I must have strength . . . . . must have strength . . . . . when the wretchings have ceased . . . . . to put these papers into my mouth . . . . . toward the back . . . . . not swallowing them . . . . . lock my jaws . . . . . keep them locked . . . . . .they . . . . . they . . . . . want to . . . . . fall . . . . . open . . . . . keep . . . . . them . . . . . locked . . . . . locked . . . . . .

And . . . . . see . . . . . I . . . . . am not . . . . . mad . . . . . not . . . . . mad . . . . . to the . . . . . very . . . end . . . not . . . . . mad!

Madame . . . . . .
. . . . . est . . . . . .
. . . . . servie . . . . . .

a daypoem of walking-thoughts

by Barry Dwyer

morning light
touches the eyes
like this new day
now at matins

mid-morning silver
flashes mountain outlines
silhouettes sharp enough
to cut your mind on

seething noon
the smell of earth
rich in death

yellow thoughts of butterflies
slice toward summer

and the river rushes high
with snow-melt

snowy reliefs
softening jagged reality
peaks and ridges begin to pastel
mountains in negligees of pink
sonnets of sunset
landscapes of wine
on which to get drunk

a rising light behind the mountain
moving higher in the night
pilgrim drift-clouds moving east
on a thoughtless wind
suddenly the moon
visionary pearl
reflections of another day
centered over the mountain
mythic monolith
singing to the ring
of our stars

The Happy Death of Frieda Saperstein

Coaxed from the wet warm place . . .
it was as though you
had tried to crawl back into
that black broken womb
to wait and . . . die.

I did it.
Too long in the hollow of my gut
giving birth at last to a cold, stone-hard baby . . .
It will not cry no matter how long, how hard
you rub its cold stone back.
Wrapped in a sheath of blue slime,
it's convulsive, the lungs flatten and it
slips through the knuckles of the rubber hand
that holds it between my legs like a light.
There are no more.

Little thin ankles—
they suspend you like a Japanese lantern;
the mishapen head
hangs like a party favor.

I clung to the rocks, rescued you from the sea.
I licked at your disease with my tongue—
I ate what you had.
I gnawed at the ropes—freed you from would-be bandits.
I bore you out of your grave.
I did it.
Now they pack me full of goo
and leave me alone on a green table, a buzz
burning at the sides of my head.

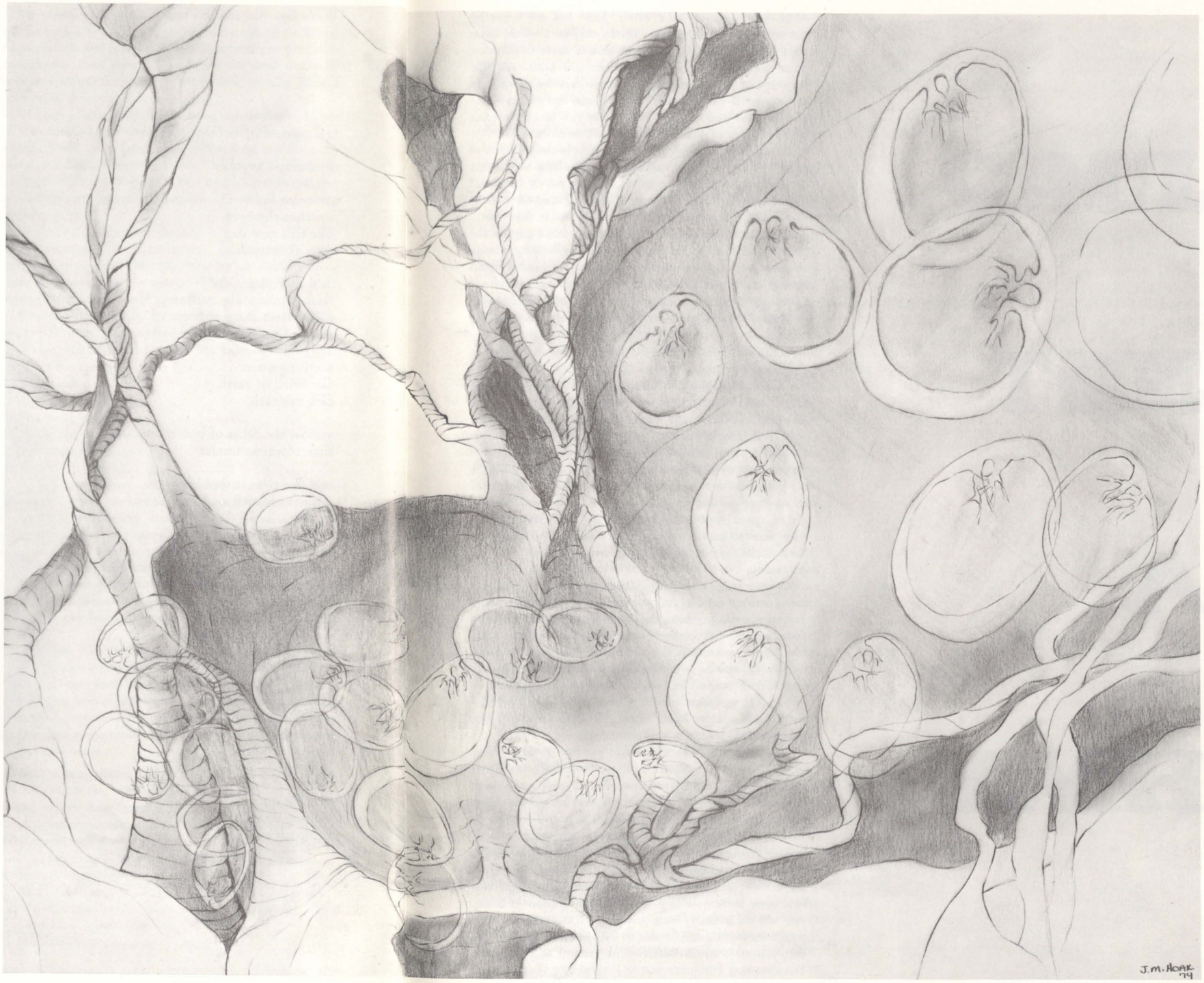
Happy birthday, Freida Saperstein!
It came from jumping rope—
using the cord like string.

You are Frieda Saperstein
baby girl of none—
You are Frieda Saperstein
so you won't go nameless into a
shallow, markerless baby grave.
You are Frieda Saperstein
as I am. You am I.
Happy death, small girl,
issuing forth like . . . .

It was me.
I did it.
I did it.

It's done with.

by J. R. Alley



I'M NOT A HACK;

So you want to be a writer, huh? Let me begin by discouraging you. Everyone thinks they're a writer these days. Some of them actually are writers, some of them are quite wealthy, and a few of them are both. But the majority of people who pound typewriters for a living are secretaries (if you call that "living"), and not writers. Once you get past Rod McKuen and Mickey Spillane, the market is extremely small and the competition enormous.

Despite all this, great numbers of people cover forests of paper and annoy mailmen with their boundless hopes. Part of the reason might be called the "curse of literacy." McLuhan notwithstanding, people do still read all sorts of things and often conclude, "I could do better than that." Add to this the experience of watching some guy on the Carson show who's feathered his nest by writing a book about seagulls; not to mention reports of Solzhenitsyn's fat Swiss bank account. (Not bad for a Communist.) It is not surprising then, that an amazing number of people harbor dreams of writing the Great American Novel and/or making a bundle.

O.K. You've written a big fat book about this crazy dude who's got a peg leg and chases a white whale all over the ocean. First of all, it'll never sell—no love interest. But maybe it has that certain something that would make it a sure-fire bestseller, what do you do with it? Mail it to some publishers, they'll have a flunky glance at it, and send it back with a nice note advising you not to quit your job at Delco. Nobody told you about the catch. Most books by big publishers were submitted through an agent. You need an agent to get a reputation, and you need a reputation to get an agent. Agents don't give a damn if you can write, they want to know what you have sold lately. You gotta have market appeal and adoring fans. What you need is a rep, kiddo.

Getting a rep involves paying your dues. This does not mean bribing editors and publishers, although that helps. Before you do anything else, read some of the writing in your genre that is currently being published. This has many advantages: you can get some idea of what is being published, who is being published and occasionally you might read something worthwhile, which is always a surprise. If you don't read other writers you are either selfish, ignorant, or both. These guys were hacks like you one day, and you can learn from them.

Now in case no one ever taught you how to write, listen to this: No one can teach you how to write. All you can do is plug away at it, get responses from people and rewrite like crazy. Avoid the Famous Writers School and their lesser known imitators. They will charge you a fortune for lessons in grammar and mediocrity. If you can't stand locking yourself up all the time and waiting for the mail to come, take a creative writing course, any one will do. You'll get to meet other hacks like yourself and get a chance to hear some rotten writing. The great thing about it is that you will occasionally hear something worth considering in your own writing and be able to walk away with the feeling that you are a much better writer than all of those slobs. The class may stimulate you to keep writing, and that is a

good thing. But don't overdo it. Don't take everything they say to heart and don't pester everyone with your own stuff. Realize how great you are and pretend to be humble at all times.

Where was I? O.K., getting a rep. You gotta start small—don't compose your Nobel acceptance speech just yet. Once you have a manuscript in completed form, you should send it somewhere. There are two places to look for addresses. One is *Writer's Market*, a big fat book that costs a fortune. Don't buy it, it goes out of date in a year, and most libraries have it anyway. Find some addresses of places that might want to use your stuff and send it out in the mail. After that you should do two things: keep your fingers crossed and send something somewhere else. Always have something in the mail at all times—that way there is still hope. Oh, and keep a copy of everything—magazines fold all the time, and even if you enclose a SSAE (Stamped, Self-Addressed Envelope) you still might not get it back.

The big problem with *Writer's Digest* is that most of the places listed will pay for stuff they use. As a result, you run into the old agent-reputation runaround again. But there is another place to look, *The International Directory of Little Magazines and Small Presses*. The *IDLMSP* is worth buying, especially since most libraries don't have it. Send $3.50 to Dustbooks, Box EE, Paradise, California, 95969. The next edition is due out in June and will cost $4.95. Anyway, it's a good little book. Full of places that might want to use your stuff, but won't pay you anything, just copies. The thing is that you have a better chance of getting started this way—Hemingway, to name a few, got his start in little magazines. Perhaps your sun will also rise.

If this still doesn't work, you have two alternatives: Give up, or start your own magazine and publish it yourself. If you've read this far, you're too dumb to give up, so I'll tell you a little about publishing. It costs a lot of money. More than you can afford. You have to goose a little cash out of some patron of the arts. Rich uncles, government grants, and embezzling are other methods. Use your imagination. Once you've found an "angel," as we say in the trade, you're ready to start. Rather than give away all my secrets, I'll refer you to a book, *The Publish It Yourself Handbook*, available from the Pushcart Book Press, Box 845, Yonkers, N.Y., 10702 for $3.00. It has lots of information presented in a format that is much more optimistic than this stupid article. Just remember that Walt Whitman got started by publishing his own material, whoever he was.

There is another way to publish yourself—subsidy publishing, better known as vanity press. A number of these outfits will take whatever garbage you give them, print it up and charge you a million dollars to cover their costs. Despite their promises of sales promotion, advertising and tales of amazing success stories, what you end up with is a houseful of books that you can't even give away to your relatives. If you have that much money lying around, why do you want to be a writer in the first place? Send some of it to me, I'll be glad to tell you what a great writer you are.

All right, you've paid your dues, suffered in a cold water flat, and lo and behold, your dumb book is praised in the

CALL ME A TAXI

New York Times Book Review. Everyone will pat you on the back and hope that your second book is a flop. What do you do now? Simply get all the money you can. Hit the road, appear on talk shows, give readings, lectures, autograph parties, get into barroom brawls, etc. Your agent will help you, he gets ten percent. Soon you'll become a celebrity, you can live off your reputation and hardly ever have to write. Tell everyone that you're working on a big, big book that will make *Jane Eyre* look like *Wuthering Heights*. Meanwhile your agent will line up lots of cream-puff assignments for *Playboy* and anyone who will pay for your special kind of drivel. If, by chance, you're a serious artist, become a recluse and pretend to avoid the limelight. This drives them crazy; they'll bug you night and day for interviews, endorsements and movie rights. Only give in to offers you can't refuse. If it turns out that you do something awful, blame it on the editor or movie director and sadly shake your head all the way to the bank. Don't ever let anyone know you're a phony. Work at humility and always make lots of cryptic remarks. Attach yourself to a cause, or better yet, attack one. Your name should appear in at least one national publication a week. If it doesn't you're washed up.

It happens to the best of us. If you've managed to hustle enough money, you can retire to a villa in Spain somewhere and watch TV all day and have affairs with young girls. Once in awhile your stuff will appear in anthologies and critics will make their reputations attacking you or defending you. ("Hack Reconsidered") Depending on how misspent your youth was, you can live for many years in splendor, surrounded by people who want to be included in your will. Keep all your writing, be it diaries, letters, laundry slips, or what. Once you've shuffled off this mortal coil, your survivors will want to get rich publishing your papers. It's the least you can do, after the way you've treated them.

But the most important thing to do before you go to that big typewriter in the sky, the final crisis resolution, you must remember to publish your memoirs. Tell all about so-and-so and what you really meant by this and that. It is sure to cause a sensation and keep your name in print for many years. And don't forget to mention that you owe it all to me.